U.S. Department of Education

Identifying and Addressing Priority Education Needs

Southeast

Regional Advisory Committee

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MSG
MANHATTAN STRATEGY GROUP

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities and results of the Southeast Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), authorized under the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA) (Pub. L. 107-279; 20 U.S.C. § 9605). The 10 RACs were established to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Education (Secretary) regarding the educational needs of one of the ten regions served by the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) for input regarding technical assistance (TA) activities described in Section 203 of the ETAA and how those needs would be most effectively addressed. The Secretary sought recommendations for nominations to serve on the RAC from the Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, and education stakeholders within each region, and appointed members to the RAC in August 2023. The activities discussed in this report took place from August to November 2023.

The Southeast Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) was established to address the educational needs of the Southeast region through technical assistance provided by the Comprehensive Centers. It consisted of thirteen individuals representing the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Members reviewed a regional profile comprised of educational statistics and other relevant data to inform their individual assessments of the challenges and educational needs in the region. The RAC additionally sought input from Chief Executive Officers of States; Chief State School Officers; REL Governing Boards, and other education stakeholders through processes including online surveys, data analysis, a focus group, and a public comment survey, which received input from 149 individuals. The goal of these processes was to solicit the views and needs of schools (including public charter schools), educators, parents, teachers, administrators, local education agencies (LEAs), librarians, businesses, state education agencies (SEAs), and other customers within the region regarding the need for the activities described in 20 U.S.C. sections 9564 and 9602 and how those needs would be most effectively addressed.

The Southeast RAC held three virtual meetings to discuss and conduct its needs assessment. During the first meeting, held on September 5, 2023, the RAC reviewed educational data and public comments, deliberated, and made recommendations to address the needs of the region. During the second meeting, held on October 11, 2023, the RAC reviewed additional data, deliberated on the educational needs of their region, and voted on the top five recommended priorities to be included in a final needs assessment report. A final meeting was held on November 14, 2023, to review the subcommittees' written recommendations and vote to approve the final needs assessment report for submission to the Secretary.

Based on their comprehensive needs assessment activities, the committee identified five priority areas that require immediate attention:

➢ **Priority 1: Discipline.** This priority entails addressing discipline issues prevalent within schools. The committee recommends promoting a more holistic and supportive approach to discipline, focusing on addressing the underlying causes of behavior issues and supporting the well-being and success of all students.

➢ **Priority 2: Literacy and Mathematics Achievement.** Another priority is to focus on improving student performance in the areas of literacy and mathematics. The committee suggests implementing evidence-based instructional strategies, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and leveraging technology to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

➢ **Priority 3: Teacher Recruitment and Retention.** Finding effective strategies to attract and retain qualified teachers is identified as a priority. The committee recommends offering competitive salaries and benefits, providing mentoring and support programs for new teachers, and creating professional growth opportunities.

➢ **Priority 4: Post-Secondary Education.** Enhancing post-secondary education opportunities for students is identified as a priority area. The committee suggests strengthening partnerships between K-12 schools, colleges, and universities to better align curriculum and support seamless transitions for students. They also recommend expanding access to career and technical education programs.

➢ **Priority 5: Attendance.** Prioritizing efforts to increase student attendance rates is crucial. The committee recommends implementing strategies such as positive reinforcement, targeted interventions for students with chronic absenteeism, and community partnerships to address barriers to attendance.

The overarching objective of the committee is to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Education (Secretary) regarding the educational needs of the region. The recommendations may be used to enhance the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools, with particular emphasis on underperforming institutions, to improve educational outcomes and narrow achievement gaps. The findings of the committee will serve as a guiding force for the technical assistance activities provided by the Comprehensive Centers, aiming to effectively address the identified priority areas within the Southeast region.

Introduction

The Secretary of Education (Secretary) established ten Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), authorized by the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA) (20 U.S.C. sections 9601 et. seq.) and governed by the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (Public Law 92-463). The purpose of the RACs is to collect information on the education needs of each region and how those needs may be addressed through technical assistance activities provided by the Comprehensive Centers Program described in section 203 of the ETAA and other Department technical assistance activities.

RAC members are appointed by the Secretary based on recommendations from Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, and education stakeholders within each region. Southeast RAC membership is comprised of both Special Government Employees (SGEs) and representatives of organizations or recognizable groups of persons including state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), including rural and urban LEAs, institutions of higher education, parents, practicing educators, including classroom teachers, principals, other school administrators, researchers, and individuals from the business community. For a complete list of Southeast RAC members, please see Appendix B.

Each RAC sought input on regional educational needs from Chief Executive Officers of States, Chief State School Officers, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Governing Boards, and other education stakeholders in the region and the public. The Southeast RAC conducted outreach activities including surveys to obtain input from various constituencies on regional needs and how to address those needs, used statistical data from the Southeast Regional Profile (Appendix C), and deliberated during three public meetings from September 5 through November 14, 2023. The RAC established five subcommittees to draft a report summarizing the results of the needs assessment and their recommendations. A final public meeting was held to review the subcommittee's recommendations and vote to approve to submit the final educational needs assessment report to the Secretary.

This report is based on the assessment of educational needs within the Southeast region, which includes the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The analysis and recommendations herein represent the findings of this assessment and the advice of the Southeast RAC to the Secretary.

Data Collection

Methods and Outreach

A priority for the RAC was to actively seek input from a wide range of stakeholders to ensure diverse perspectives were considered. The RAC reached out to various constituencies, including teachers, principals, administrators at the state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs), governors, higher education institutions and community colleges, postsecondary technical programs, school boards, parents, education professional organizations, teachers' unions, local government, youth organizations, community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, and business leaders.

To facilitate this outreach, each RAC developed an outreach plan and utilized various tools to collect stakeholder feedback. These tools included an online survey and other means of data collection. RAC members were given access to Microsoft SharePoint, which served as a platform for collaboration, communication, and resource sharing.

To support their outreach efforts, RAC members were provided with informative materials such as briefs, PowerPoint presentations, and other resources that communicated the purpose of the Comprehensive Centers program and how technical assistance can enhance the capacity of SEAs and LEAs.

During the period from September 5, 2023, to November 16, 2023, RAC members engaged in needs sensing and data collection. This involved utilizing different methods for gathering information, including the dissemination of an online survey via email and public websites, as well as conducting focus groups. The online survey allowed respondents to identify their state and affiliation, express their needs, and offer recommendations through open-ended responses.

The Southeast RAC received feedback from 149 individuals on the online survey. The largest group of respondents consisted of educators (37%), followed by school administrators (20%), parents (22%), and local education agencies (4%). This diverse range of feedback ensured that the perspectives of various stakeholders were taken into consideration.

Regional Education Leadership

The RAC held a series of virtual meetings between September 5, 2023, and November 16, 2023, to discuss progress on gathering feedback from various stakeholders regarding the educational needs of the regions. The purpose of these discussions was to recommend technical assistance to address the identified needs. While every committee member attended at least three meetings, some members utilized additional sessions to develop a plan for writing the final report. The tools used for collaboration included Microsoft SharePoint for accessing and sharing resources, as well as communicating with other RAC members and regional facilitators.

The RAC meetings were facilitated by the Designated Federal Official (DFO), the Regional Liaison from the Manhattan Strategy Group (MSG), and the RAC Chair. During the first meeting, the committee members reviewed their responsibilities as RAC participants, discussed the technical assistance objectives of the Comprehensive Centers, and formulated plans for gathering information. These plans involved conducting an online needs-sensing survey targeted at stakeholders from Southeastern states,

as well as conducting focus groups and engaging in other forms of outreach. The second set of meetings primarily focused on reviewing the initial findings from the survey. Committee members shared and discussed the data collected so far, highlighting the identified needs and recommendations. Additionally, plans for analyzing the complete survey data were created, and members explored approaches to writing their individual needs assessment reports.

In addition to the committee meetings, RAC members actively sought input from a wide range of stakeholder groups. While the primary method of data collection was the online needs-sensing survey, committee members supplemented this information by utilizing other outreach strategies such as focus groups and reviewing existing data and information on the region. Regional facilitators provided guidance to the members on analyzing and summarizing the data. The data was analyzed based on stakeholder groups, and areas of need were identified using the available dataset.

Public Comments

After a thorough analysis of the regional data and survey results provided by public comments, the RAC members identified five priority education needs across the Southeast region. These priorities were determined based on various sources such as data, personal assessments/experiences, and research literature. The RAC members have also provided justifications for each priority need, bringing attention to the specific data sources used.

Furthermore, the RAC members made recommendations for the comprehensive centers on how they can help address these priority needs effectively. In cases where specific needs at the classroom or school level have been identified, the RAC members were encouraged to consider how State Education Agencies (SEAs) can address these needs and suggest ways in which the comprehensive centers can support and enhance SEA capacity.

Overall, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the identified education needs in the Southeast region, justifications for their prioritization, and recommendations for comprehensive centers to provide technical assistance. Additionally, it should be noted that this report heavily relies on input provided by public comments from other stakeholders in the region. The perspectives and insights shared by these stakeholders played a significant role in shaping the priorities and recommendations presented in this report. Their contributions provided valuable context and real-world experiences, enriching the overall findings and analysis.

Summary of Findings

The members of the Southeast Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) and stakeholders identified a need to focus on improving reading and mathematics instruction in the Southeast region. This discussion was based on the public comments provided by stakeholders and led to a deeper inquiry into students' proficiency rates by subgroup and ethnicity. While a direct comparison of state assessments may not be appropriate due to inconsistent standards across state lines, the RAC members discussed using data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) The Nation's Report Card to review data for each jurisdiction. The committee also emphasized the need for additional support for special education, particularly in dyslexia, to enhance literacy instruction. To facilitate this discussion, the committee reviewed the aggregated data of the 2022 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading and Mathematics for students in Grades 4 and 8 across all states in the Southeast region.

Furthermore, the committee recognized the need to address post-secondary attainment. Concerns were raised through public comments regarding standardized test scores and retention rates in math and reading classes, which impact the number of students requiring remedial courses in post-secondary institutions.

While the committee discussed the correlation between economic status and academic achievement, it acknowledged the limited capacity of the Comprehensive Centers to provide technical assistance in this area. However, the committee identified that economic status could influence not only academic performance but also other factors such as behavior, the digital divide, and eligibility for exceptional student education (ESE) programs.

RAC members also extensively discussed teacher recruitment and retention challenges. In particular, difficulties in hiring minority teachers, specifically men, were highlighted. A focus group, consisting of representatives from Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina, reviewed various studies and local-level data. The group proposed recommendations such as providing supplements for teachers certified in specific areas, adjusting teacher compensation, and implementing multiple strategies to retain teachers.

Lastly, the impact of COVID-19 on student attendance and engagement was discussed. The committee reviewed resources such as The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center and data from the National Center for Education Statistics. It was found that chronic absenteeism, particularly since the start of the pandemic, had a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement levels. State and subgroup attendance data were also provided for further analysis. This discussion also highlighted data indicating disparities in disciplinary procedures and the disproportionate representation of minority groups and students with disabilities. Data from the Civil Rights Data Collection were presented, including estimations of disciplinary actions by type and statistics related to preschool discipline, restraint and seclusion, and school climate (e.g., bullying, arrests, offenses).

Based on a comprehensive needs assessment conducted through various activities such as data profiles, public comments, and stakeholder feedback, the Southeast RAC identified five key priority areas that require immediate attention to address the educational needs of the region. These priorities are:

- ➢ **Priority 1:** Addressing discipline issues within schools through a holistic and supportive approach,

- ➢ **Priority 2:** Improving student performance in literacy and mathematics,

- ➢ **Priority 3:** Implementing effective strategies to recruit and retain qualified teachers,

- ➢ **Priority 4:** Enhancing post-secondary education opportunities for students, and

- ➢ **Priority 5:** Prioritizing efforts to increase student attendance rates.

By sharing these priorities, the committee aims to enhance the capacity of educational institutions, narrow achievement gaps, and improve educational outcomes in the Southeast region.

Recommendations

Priority 1: Discipline

Outcomes/Findings

Exclusionary and punitive discipline has been a persistent and controversial concern for decades, particularly in light of the deleterious effects on students subjected to disciplinary procedures and the disproportionate representation of minority groups and students with disabilities. To begin, when considering the consequences of disciplinary exclusions, it is evident that affected students are prone to experience reduced academic performance, increased dropout rates, and a higher likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior, both in the short term and over the long term.

Regarding aversive and punitive discipline, according to U.S. Department of Education Data, 70,833 students were subjected to physical restraint, 27,538 seclusion, and 3,619 mechanical restraints; 80% of students subjected to physical restraint were students with disabilities. Further, Katsiyannis et al. (2020) reported that Black students were almost 200% more likely and Hispanic students were 45% more likely to experience a restraint or seclusion than their White counterparts. Finally, in 2017-2018, Black students accounted for 28.7% of all students referred to law enforcement and 31.6% of all students arrested at school though comprising 15.1% of the school population. Black students with disabilities accounted for 8.4% of students referred to law enforcement and 9.1% of students arrested though representing 2.3% of the total enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Priority Needs

Given the dire consequences associated with exclusionary and punitive discipline, it is necessary for extensive and comprehensive technical support. First, measures employed by schools such as zero tolerance policies, increased presence of police on school campuses (school resource officers), and state legislation criminalizing misconduct in school have been controversial and relatively ineffective. According to the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), zero tolerance policies over the years have been largely ineffective. Further, in 2016-19, ADHD (9.8%), anxiety problems (9.4%), behavior problems (8.9%), and depression (4.4%) are the most diagnosed mental disorders in children and adolescents ages 3-17 years. In 2018-2019, 15.1% of adolescents had a major depressive episode, 36.7% had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, 4.1% had a substance use disorder, and 18.8% seriously considered attempting suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Technical Assistance Recommendations

Technical assistance addressing the U. S. Department of Education (2023), *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates*, would benefit educational institutions by fostering a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environment (Guiding Principle 1) and supporting the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies (Guiding Principle 2). Continued support in establishing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), an evidence-based framework for tiered support to address students' educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs, is needed. The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (2023) offers a wealth of resources and implementation strategies.

First and foremost, it is imperative to underscore the importance of addressing the mental health needs of students, especially in light of the recent pandemic and alarming statistics released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2023. Equipping educators with professional development in areas such as student observation, data collection, analysis, and the identification of replacement behaviors that align with the underlying causes of problematic behaviors is fundamental to enhancing our current disciplinary practices. Moreover, administrators should also receive ongoing professional development and oversight in matters relating to disciplinary practices, with a specific focus on addressing implicit bias, intervention strategies, cultural awareness, and responsive teaching. These initiatives not only promote more constructive responses to problematic behavior but also contribute to the positive social development of our students (IES, 2021).

Furthermore, the methods of learning and engaging socially have had to adapt to mitigate physical health risks, significantly altering the typical social experiences that help our children learn how to interact with one another. Additionally, the direct effects of COVID-19 on children's well-being are a cause for concern.

It is crucial to recognize that appropriate school behavior must now be explicitly taught rather than simply expected of students entering our schools. We must view these students through a lens that acknowledges their differences from those of a decade or two ago, necessitating a corresponding adjustment in our educational practices to better align with the demands of our evolving world.

Additional References for Further Consideration

The following information was not compiled during the data collection period, nor was it discussed during Meeting #2; however, the Southeast RAC presents this information to further support its justification as to why this is a priority for the region.

Additionally, as reported by Rumberger and Losen (2017), exclusionary discipline carries a heavy economic toll. Nonetheless, in the 2017-18 school year, students missed 11,205,797 school days because of exclusionary measures, with Black students, Native Americans, Hispanics, and students with disabilities being over-represented. Specifically, Whitford et al. (2019) reported that in 2015-16, Native Americans were 755% more likely to experience a suspension, and 2, 900% more likely to be expelled than White students. Gage et al. (2019) reported that Black students were 248% more likely to receive an out of school suspension (OSS) and 434% more likely to be expelled. Gage et al. (2021) also found that Hispanic students were 63% more likely to experience an OSS and 157% more likely to be expelled than White students. Finally, although students with disabilities represented 13.2% of total student enrollment, they received 24.5% of one or more out-of-school suspensions enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The likelihood of being suspended or expelled was 7.5% higher for students with developmental disabilities (Center for American Progress, 2018.)

Similarly, in 2017-2018, there were 69,492 instances of corporal punishment, primarily in Southern states, with students with disabilities being 110% and Black students being more likely to receive corporal punishment (McSuga-Gage et al., 2021). Effects related to corporal punishment include serious injury, increased aggressive and problematic behavior, mental health problems, and lower academic achievement (Gershoff & Font, 2016; Visser et al., 2022).

Furthermore, both researchers and practitioners have raised concerns about the role of School Resource Officers (SROs) in enhancing school safety while potentially exacerbating the school-to-prison pipeline (Counts et al., 2018), and school disturbance laws not only criminalizing student behavior but also disproportionately affecting marginalized groups (Rivera-Calderón, 2019).

Considering the rising prevalence of autism spectrum disorder, coupled with the increasing incidence of mental illness, suicide, and homelessness, all intertwined with the lingering effects of the pandemic, it is essential that our educational institutions adapt to meet these challenges (Mulkey et al., 2023). Many infants missed crucial social development opportunities by not being able to observe facial expressions concealed by masks during their formative years. Recent research reveals that infants born during the pandemic experienced a developmental delay of approximately six months (Yu & Xu, 2023). Older students have also been deprived of essential in-person learning experiences, as they were thrust into the virtual world.

Priority 2: Literacy and Mathematics Achievement

Early literacy and numeracy are two essential skills that develop during the early-childhood period. These skills are critical for school success, and children's performance in these areas tends to be stable over time. To understand the difference between literacy skills and numeracy skills, one must understand the true definitions of literacy and numeracy. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write, whereas numeracy refers to the ability to understand simple math concepts. Numeracy is defined as the ability to comprehend and apply basic math concepts in real-world scenarios. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are considered basic math concepts. Both are essential skills needed in day-to-day life and are considered basic skills for most areas of work.

Outcomes/Findings

NAEP achievement levels are performance standards that describe what students should know and be able to do. Results are reported as percentages of students performing at or above three achievement levels (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*). Students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level on NAEP assessments demonstrate solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter. It should be noted that the *NAEP Proficient* achievement level does not represent grade-level proficiency as determined by other assessment standards (e.g., state or district assessments). Average scores are reported on the NAEP reading scale that ranges from zero to 500.

4th Grade Mathematics

In 2022, 36% of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level on the mathematics assessment, which was five percentage points lower compared to 2019 and was 24 percentage points higher than the percentage in 1990, the first assessment year. Seventy-five percent of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level in mathematics, which was five percentage points lower than in 2019 and 25 percentage points higher than in 1990. In 2022, the percentages of fourth-grade students who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in mathematics were lower for most reported student groups compared to 2019, the previous assessment year. The percentages of students who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level were lower for the following student groups:

- Asian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, students of Two or More Races, and White students;
- Male and female students;
- Students who were eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program;
- Students attending public schools;
- Students attending public, non-charter schools;
- Students attending city, suburban, town, and rural schools;
- Students attending schools in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions;
- Students who were not identified as students with disabilities; and
- Students who were not identified as English learners.

(NAEP Mathematics: National Achievement-Level Results, 2022)

8th Grade Mathematics

In 2022, 26% of eighth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level on the mathematics assessment, which was seven percentage points lower compared to 2019 and 11 percentage points higher than the percentage in 1990, the first assessment year. Sixty-two percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level in mathematics, which was seven percentage points lower than in 2019 and 10 percentage points higher than in 1990. In 2022, the percentages of eighth-grade students who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in mathematics were lower for most reported student groups than in 2019, the previous assessment year. The percentages of students who performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level were lower for the following student groups:

- Asian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, students of Two or More Races, and White students;
- Male and female students;
- Students who were eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program;
- Students across all parental education categories;
- Students attending public schools;
- Students attending charter and public, non-charter schools;
- Students attending city, suburban, town, and rural schools;
- Students attending schools in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions;
- Students who were and were not identified as students with disabilities; and
- Students who were not identified as English learners.

(NAEP Mathematics: National Achievement-Level Results, 2022)

4th Grade Reading

The average reading score for fourth-grade students in 2022 was three points lower compared to 2019, the previous assessment year. The 2022 average score was not significantly different compared to the first reading assessment in 1992. Average scores are reported on the NAEP reading scale that ranges from zero to 500. Thirty-three percent of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Proficien*t level on the reading assessment in 2022. This percentage was two percentage points lower compared to 2019 but was five percentage points higher in comparison to 1992, the first reading assessment year. Sixty-three percent of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Basic* level in 2022. This percentage was four percentage points lower compared to 2019 but was not significantly different compared to 1992. Thirty-seven percent of fourth-grade students performed below the *NAEP Basic* level in 2022, which was four percentage points higher compared to 2019 and not significantly different from 1992. Nine percent of fourth-graders performed at the *NAEP Advanced* level in 2022, which was not significantly different from 2019 but was higher in comparison to 1992. While many student groups had lower average scores in 2022, the average score for fourth-grade Asian/Pacific Islander students, students of Two or More Races, students attending charter schools or schools in rural locations, students identified as students with disabilities, and students identified as English learners did not differ significantly from 2019. Across student groups, average fourth-grade reading scores in 2022 were lower for the following student groups:

- American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, and White students;
- Male and female students;
- Students eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program;
- Students attending public schools;
- Students attending public, non-charter schools;
- Students attending schools in city, suburban, and town locations;
- Students attending schools in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions;
- Students who were not identified as students with disabilities; and
- Students who were not identified as English learners.

In comparison to 1992, however, average fourth-grade reading scores in 2022 were higher for Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White students (NAEP Reading: National Achievement-Level Results, 2022).

8th Grade Reading

In 2022, the average reading score for eighth-grade students was three points lower than 2019, the previous assessment year and not significantly different from 1992, the first assessment year. Average scores are reported on the NAEP reading scale that ranges from 0 to 500. In 2022, 31% of eighth-grade students performed at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level on the reading assessment, which was three percentage points lower compared to 2019, the previous assessment year. The percentage of eighth-grade students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in 2022 was not significantly different compared to 1992, the first assessment year. In 2022, 70% of eighth-graders performed at or above the

NAEP Basic level, which was 3 points lower compared to 2019. The percentage of students performing at or above the *NAEP Basic* level was not significantly different compared to 1992. Four percent of eighth-grade students performed at the *NAEP Advanced* level in 2022, which was not significantly different in comparison to either 2019 or to 1992. In 2022, average reading scores for eighth-grade students were lower compared to the previous assessment in 2019 for the following student groups:

- White students;
- Male and female students;
- Students eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program;
- Students whose parents had graduated from high school, students whose parents had some education after high school, and students whose parents graduated from college;
- Students attending public schools;
- Students attending public, non-charter schools;
- Students attending schools in suburban and rural locations;
- Students attending schools in the Northeast, Midwest, and South regions;
- Students who were not identified as students with disabilities; and
- Students who were not identified as English learners.

The average score was higher in 2022 compared to 2019 for students identified as English learners. Compared to 1992, average eighth-grade reading scores in 2022 were higher for the following student groups: Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Hispanic students, and students whose parents did not graduate from high school (NAEP Reading: National Achievement-Level Results, 2022).

Priority Needs

In addressing the gap between literacy and mathematics, we need to flip the switch on education. It really is not about grades or grading; it is about mastery. If educators are ever going to begin to close the gap in literacy and numeracy, all parties involved must be on the same team. It is essential for targeted support to begin before students enter the fourth grade.

In reviewing the data provided by NAEP, it is critical that literacy and numeracy skills are the foundations of lifelong learning and full participation in society. These skills provide knowledge for students to think critically and creatively in order to reach their full potential. We must see the essential need for the continuation of professional development to strengthen throughout all grade spans, but more importantly the early age students. Numeracy and literacy skills serve as the building blocks for learning throughout any student's time. Proficiency in these areas creates a strong foundation for understanding more complex concepts through school.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

During Meeting #2, the Southeast RAC members recommended the following technical assistance activities to address this priority need in the region:

- Provide more and better professional development to teachers, including special education teachers, to support students;

- Provide guidance to help LEAs recruit and leverage more specialized K-5 teachers;

- Provide resources to help teachers understand the effects of language impairment on reading and math;

- Provide guidance to LEAs on how to increase the number of paraprofessionals and tutors assigned to work with small groups in the classrooms or outside of classrooms to push some of the skills that students are lacking in early elementary grades;

- Provide leadership development opportunities to ensure leaders have the professional development they need to become instructional leaders and understand instructional demands;

- Provide resources on the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy to LEAs; and

- Provide resources to LEAs on best practices in intervention strategies.

Additional References for Further Consideration

The following information was not compiled during the data collection period, nor was it discussed during Meeting #2; however, the Southeast RAC presents this information to further support its justification as to why this is a priority for the region.

The Frontiers in Education Report sets out to examine the development of emerging literacy and numeracy skills during early childhood to better understand the foundation for reading and mathematical skills (Salminen et al., 2021). The authors of *Developmental Milestones: Motor Development* stated that children grow at their fastest rate based upon their environment (Gerber et al., 2010).

In a study on improving numeracy, results indicated that participants who received targeted intervention improved more than twice as much on standardized tests as expected from passage of time and made significantly higher gains than students who received non-targeted mathematics intervention (Kadosh, et al., 2013).

During the early childhood period, children's language skills are growing rapidly, and children's developing language appears to underlie literacy and numeracy related skill development. There is a relationship between language development, literacy, and numeracy. Children's ability to define specific work has been associated with a range for numeracy skills in kindergarten and preschool (Foster, Another, Clements, Sarama, 2015; Purpura, Schmnitt, & Ganley, 2017).

Priority 3: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Outcomes/Findings

One of the biggest challenges facing our nation's system of public education is the shortage of qualified educators. Examining the number of graduates from colleges and universities across the region and the U.S., the dwindling number of students completing their degrees in education is alarming in every state, especially in the areas of math, science, and special education.

Some school systems are using other degree earners to fill empty classrooms. These employees often take an alternative route to teaching. The National Center for Education Statistics contends that as of October 2022, 44% of public schools were operating without a full teaching staff. The average public

school had two vacant teaching positions, and 4% of all public school teaching positions across the country were vacant. Percentages were higher in high-poverty neighborhoods. More than half of public schools in high-poverty neighborhoods (55%) had at least one teaching vacancy, compared to 40% of public schools in low-poverty neighborhoods. Fifty-eight percent of public schools with a high-minority student body (greater than 75% minority) had at least one teaching vacancy, compared to 32% of schools with low-minority student body (25% or less minority).

The rural schools suffer just as much if not more than the suburban areas. In the rural settings, teachers usually have more responsibilities outside of the classroom setting. In addition, there is often a lack of appropriate materials, isolation, deteriorating building conditions, and limited professional autonomy. To retain rural teachers, school systems can offer opportunities for new and returning teachers to interact with community members and to have a voice in decision making. There should also be time set aside for professional networking. In urban schools, the annual rate of turnover is greater than the national average.

Feedback was also gained from a RAC focus group discussion conducted on October 6, 2023. Themes that arose were frustration from mid- and late-career teachers about new teacher bonuses and incentives that veteran teachers were not receiving. Concerns were also raised about teacher housing (either lack of or high cost), affordable high-quality childcare, and the burden of student loans coupled with low salaries.

The Georgia Department of Education led a *Teacher Burnout Report* in 2022. Small- and whole-group discussions from the task force determined priorities in five areas: assessment; preserving and protecting time; pressures/unrealistic expectations; teacher voice and professional growth; and mental health and wellness. These five areas were determined to be areas of priority to focus on to improve teacher recruitment and retention in Georgia.

As a follow-up to the *Teacher Burnout Report*, the Georgia Department of Education's Office of Rural Education and Innovation interviewed rural teachers around the state and reported on rural teacher burnout in Summer 2022. The rural focus groups and interviews highlighted the common stressors for teachers: challenges with support from parents, resources, internet, transportation for students, outside classroom challenges, student learning gaps, parental value on education, extra duties and responsibilities, work/life balance, and the lack of certified teachers. However, it was apparent that teachers love their students and are fiercely determined to teach them and move them forward after the pandemic.

Over 149 public comments were gathered to inform this RAC report. The main themes from the public comments included teacher burnout/overwhelm due to increasing demands and changing expectations, concerns about teacher salaries, extreme discipline issues, a lack of both student and parental accountability, and a need for both academic and mental health resources and interventions, especially for students who are behind or at-risk.

All these sources, interviews, focus groups, and surveys revealed similar concerns around teacher recruitment and retention. There are layers of factors to be considered from salary to school climate to the demands and expectations we have of teachers, especially with high-needs populations of students.

Priority Needs

Increasing teacher recruitment and retention requires a sustainable and comprehensive strategy. Southeast RAC members recommended focusing on:

- Continuing to research the factors impacting teacher recruitment and retention;
- Examining the factors affecting teacher morale, including preserving and protecting time;
- Examining the factors impacting teacher mental health and wellness, including a supportive work environment and recognition;
- Examining teacher salaries, especially in high-poverty and high-minority areas;
- Examining testing requirements for students;
- Examining teacher duties and responsibilities as well as extra demands that are placed on them, including meetings and paperwork; and
- Allowing for teacher voice when decisions are made.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

The Southeast RAC recommends providing technical assistance in the following areas:

- Finding and sharing effective strategies to attract and retain qualified teachers;
- Determining how districts can offer competitive salaries and benefits, especially in rural districts that do not have a strong tax base;
- Providing mentoring and support programs for new and induction-level teachers; and
- Creating professional development for all levels of teachers, especially for veteran teachers, to allow for growth and leadership opportunities.

Additional References for Further Consideration

The following information was not compiled during the data collection period, nor was it discussed during Meeting #2; however, the Southeast RAC presents this information to further support its justification as to why this is a priority for the region.

According to Garcia and Weiss in an Economic Policy Institute publication (2019) titled "Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market":

A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole. Lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. The teacher shortage makes it more difficult to build a solid reputation for teaching and to professionalize it, which further contributes to perpetuating the shortage. In addition, the fact that the shortage is distributed so unevenly among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds challenges the U.S. education system's goal of providing a sound education equitably to all children.

Franco and Patrick (2023) agree that the number of teachers without certification is soaring across the country: "Based on data from states with published information, forty-seven states plus the District of

Columbia had an estimated 286,290 teachers who were not fully certified for their teaching assignments. The 21 states with published data on vacancies had 27,844 unfilled teacher positions. These estimates indicate that, at a minimum, 314,134 positions were either unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments, representing about one in 10 of all teaching positions nationally."

Attrition places a financial burden on school systems, and it negatively affects school climate and student achievement. "In high-turnover schools, the inexperienced and underqualified teachers often hired to fill empty spots also have a negative impact on student learning. Financially, the report estimates that each teacher who leaves, on average, can cost as much as $20,000 in an urban district" (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). Turnover is higher in the South than in the Northeast where teachers are more satisfied with salary, smaller class sizes, and greater investments in education.

Because of the demands and challenges teachers are experiencing, teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations. "Key influences on turnover include a lack of administrative support, working in districts with lower salaries, dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures, lack of opportunities for advancement, and dissatisfaction with working conditions" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Priority 4: Post-Secondary Education

Outcomes/Findings

Educational attainment refers to the highest degree received by an individual. As indicated by the U.S. Department of Commerce (n.d.), the achievement of higher levels of education in the population move the economy and society forward because "the American workforce improves in quality which is an essential tool for the United States to participate competitively in the global market and prosper economically."

The benefits of higher education attainment levels are multiple and at different levels. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), education is associated with educational and social outcomes such as productivity, economic growth, innovation, labor market outcomes, government public returns, social mobility, civil participation, and health outcomes.

The U.S. Census Bureau asks in the American Community Survey in 2021 the question, "What is the highest degree or level of school this person has completed?" with responses ranging from no schooling completed to doctorate degree. Responses corresponding to post-secondary education attainment include some college credit, but less than one year of college; one or more years of college credit, no degree; associate degree; bachelor's degree; master's degree; professional degree beyond bachelor's degree; and doctorate degree.

Priority Needs

Increasing post-secondary educational attainment requires a sustainable and comprehensive strategy. The Southeast RAC highlighted the need to focus on:

- Researching the factors impacting high school graduation rates and their relations to college enrollment;

- Examining the factors affecting college readiness;

- Examining the factors influencing post-secondary persistence and completion;

- Addressing the need to prepare students to be college-ready through public policy;

- Addressing the need to increase post-secondary persistence and completion through public policy;

- Expanding funding for transition college bridge programs to strengthen academic gaps;

- Expanding funding to increase post-secondary persistence and completion;

- Expanding funding for basic needs for post-secondary students;

- Addressing equity issues related to post-secondary education attainment; and

- Disseminating best practices on college readiness and academic persistence.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

The Southeast RAC recommends providing technical assistance in the following areas:

- Best practices to develop, implement, and evaluate college readiness programs;

- Best practices on strategies that effectively foster college persistence and completion;

- How to create effective community-level partnerships to meet the basic needs of post-secondary students; and

- Strategies to identify equity issues related to post-secondary educational attainment and how to address them effectively.

Additional References for Further Consideration

The following information was not compiled during the data collection period, nor was it discussed during Meeting #2; however, the Southeast RAC presents this information to further support its justification as to why this is a priority for the region.

There is a need to increase the level of post-secondary education of the population aged 18 and older in the Southeast region. The *American Community Survey Brief on Bachelor's Degree Attainment in the United States: 2005 to 2019* reports regional variations in growth in bachelor's degree attainment among counties, with the Northeast reporting the highest average rate of residents with a bachelor's degree followed by counties in the West, Midwest, and the South as last.

The following table compares national post-secondary attainment in the Southeast region for the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in the American Community Survey:

Educational Attainment for the Southeast Region

AGE BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	USA	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Population 18 to 24 years							
Less than high school graduate	11.6%	11.9%	12.4%	14.1%	15.1%	11.1%	12.4%
High school graduate (includes equivalent)	35.4%	36.2%	34.6%	36.1%	35.7%	34.8%	37.5%
Some college or associate's degree	39.6%	42.8%	40.9%	37.8%	41.7%	41.0%	38.5 %
Bachelor's degree or higher	13.4%	9.1%	12.1%	11.9%	7.6%	13.1%	11.6%
Population 25 years and over							
Less than 9th grade	4.7%	3.4%	4.2%	4.0%	4.3%	3.7%	2.8%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	5.7%	7.8%	5.9%	6.5%	8.1%	6.1%	6.7%
Highschool graduate (includes equivalent)	26.1%	30.4%	27.1%	27.0%	30.8%	24.9%	27.7%
Some college, no degree	19.1%	20.6%	18.4%	19.1%	21.4%	19.3%	20.1%
Associate's degree	8 .8%	9.0%	10.2%	8.7%	10.7%	10.1%	10.1%
Bachelor's degree	21.6%	17.5%	21.4%	20.7%	15.2%	22.8%	19.8%
Graduate or professional degree	14.0%	11.3%	12.9%	14.0%	9.6%	13.2%	12.8%
High school graduate or higher	89.6%	88.8%	89.9%	89.5%	87.6%	90.2%	90.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	35.7%	28.8%	34.3%	34.7%	24.8%	35.9%	32.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501, 2022. Accessed on October 31, 2023.

Priority 5: Attendance

Outcomes/Findings

Among the dire educational consequences of the pandemic, the impact on student absenteeism stands out. The pandemic's long months of remote learning, hybrid schedules, and repeated quarantines frayed bonds among students and between students and educators and fractured routines of attending school. Left unaddressed, these high levels of absenteeism threaten to undermine the unprecedented

investment of federal COVID-relief funds in public schools, according to Future Ed's *Attendance Playbook* (n.d.). The alarming spike in student absenteeism recorded during the pandemic coincides with declining test scores over the same period, as previously reported by the KIDS COUNT Data Center. This trend is reflected in data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The Center found that more than 70% of U.S. public schools saw an uptick in student chronic absenteeism relative to the start of the pandemic. It also found that the average scores of nine-year-old students had dropped by five points in reading and seven points in math nationwide between 2020 and 2022.

Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent—and face the most harm because their community lacks the resources to make up for the lost learning in school. Students from communities of color as well as those with disabilities are disproportionately affected. Often absences are tied to health problems, such as asthma, diabetes, and oral and mental health issues. Other barriers including lack of a nearby school bus, a safe route to school, or food insecurity make it difficult to go to school every day according to Attendance Works.

Policymakers often recommend punitive consequences for truancy (i.e., students missing school without an excuse, skipping school, and violating mandatory attendance requirements)—such as suspensions, jail time, and fines—for children and parents, according to resources on Attendance Works. Some communities and courts have devised effective approaches to reducing truancy, but in other places, punitive efforts are pushing students out of school. Chronic absenteeism, on the other hand, incorporates all absences: excused, unexcused, and suspensions. The focus is on the academic consequences of this lost instructional time and on preventing absences before students miss so much school that they fall behind. It recognizes that students miss school for many understandable issues such as asthma or homelessness or unreliable transportation, for which a punitive response is not appropriate. But what helps is working with families to share the importance of attendance and to fix the underlying problems that lead to absenteeism.

To capitalize on the student feedback and the extensive research, one of the areas that could improve student attendance is a focus on student engagement. According to educational neuroscience expert Dr. David Sousa, student engagement can be defined as "the amount of attention, interest, curiosity, and positive emotional connections that students have when they are learning, whether in the classroom or on their own" (2016). Sousa goes on to note that engaged students have more motivation to participate in class, enjoy achieving their learning goals, are more likely to persist through challenges in learning, and feel intrinsically motivated to gain new and deeper understanding.

The public comments from the RAC survey and focus group input highlighted concerns about the attendance of both students and staff, increased mental health needs and anxiety, student and parent apathy, lack of student and parent accountability (for students to be in school and to be prepared), a need for more real-world, hands-on classwork for students, increasingly distant student-teacher relationships, and student overwhelm from the amount of lessons that are now digital (a shift from paper worksheets to digital worksheets).

Priority Needs

Increasing attendance requires a sustainable and comprehensive strategy. The Southeast RAC recommends implementing strategies such as positive reinforcement, stronger relationships with teachers, targeted interventions for students with chronic absenteeism, and community partnerships to address barriers to attendance. Members recommended focusing on:

- Prioritizing efforts to increase student attendance rates;
- Examining the factors affecting attendance, including student engagement, relevance of curriculum, student-teacher relationships, family support, transportation, and mental health and wellness;
- Examining ways to better engage parents and families;
- Allowing for student voice when decisions are made; and
- Building community partnerships to provide support and mentoring for students with chronic absenteeism.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

Southeast RAC members recommended providing technical assistance in the following areas:

- Finding and sharing effective strategies to increase student attendance rates;
- Determining how districts can build or increase family engagement;
- Finding and sharing effective strategies to include students in school decision making so their voice can be heard and considered;
- Finding and sharing effective strategies to build community partnerships and mentorships for students with chronic absenteeism; and
- Finding and sharing effective professional learning opportunities for teachers to improve student engagement, particularly in how to design hands-on, real-life experiences for students and how to build relationships with students.

Additional References for Further Consideration

The following information was not compiled during the data collection period, nor was it discussed during Meeting #2; however, the Southeast RAC presents this information to further support its justification as to why this is a priority for the region.

In the 2020-21 school year, at least 10.1 million students nationwide were chronically absent, according to the Attendance Works' 2022 blog post "Pandemic Causes Alarming Increase in Chronic Absence and Reveals Need for Better Data." Attendance Works estimates chronic absence has more than doubled from the more than eight million students, pre-COVID-19, who were missing so many days of school that they were academically at risk (Bauer, L., Liu, P., Schanzenbach, D. and Shambaugh, J., 2018). In 2021-2022, more than 2.4 million students in the Southeast region, which includes the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, were chronically absent, which means they were absent from school 10% or more school days during the school year. Chronic absence or missing 10% or more of school days due to absence for any reason—excused absences, unexcused

absences, and suspensions—can translate into students having difficulty learning to read by the third grade, achieving in middle school, and graduating from high school.

In an extensive study on absenteeism, Garcia and Weiss (2020) claim, "The literature on student absenteeism also sheds light on the relationship between learning and instructional time. The evidence indicates that the negative relationship between absenteeism and student outcomes becomes more intense the more school days that a student misses. Using data from public schools in Chicago, Allensworth and Evans (2016) noted that each week of absence per semester in ninth grade is associated with a more than 20% decline in the probability of graduating from high school. With respect to performance, the disadvantage associated with absenteeism grows as the number of days missed increases: students who missed 1–2 school days, 3–4 days, 5–10 days, or more than 10 days scored, respectively, 0.10, 0.29, 0.39, and 0.64 SD below students who missed no school on mathematics performance for eighth graders (García and Weiss, 2018).

As this correlation between days absent and declining test scores indicates, there also seems to be a point after which the disadvantage becomes much larger. Indeed, researchers put a strong emphasis on "chronic absenteeism" as the critical indicator, as students who are chronically absent are at serious risk of falling behind in school, having lower grades and test scores, exhibiting behavioral issues, and, ultimately, dropping out (Balfanz, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Gottfried and Ehrlich, 2018). Indeed, the risk of dropping out is of particular concern for students for whom the pandemic may act as the revolving door but one that ushers them away from the school period (IES, 2020; Dorn, et al. 2020; Stancati, Brody, and Fontdeglòria, 2020; Torres, 2020).

There are multiple reasons why students miss classes, as well as large differences in the absenteeism rate among both individual students and student subgroups. Those seeking to develop effective policies to reduce absenteeism, especially chronic absenteeism, understand the need to examine the root causes—academic disengagement, socioemotional distress, economic challenges, health problems, and others. Initiatives that have been rigorously evaluated show that it is critical both to identify the specific reason(s) why a student is missing school and to respond with targeted, relevant supports. This point is particularly relevant in the current context, in which so many students are frequently absent for a variety of reasons that may be difficult for teachers and schools to know or address (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Research done by The Grad Partnership claims the reasons students miss school, besides short-term illness, can be organized into four categories:

1. Out-of-school factors like chronic health conditions, working, or sibling/eldercare;

2. School avoidance such as when students are being teased or bullied or are experiencing social or academic anxiety;

3. Disengagement when students do not see the point in being in school or see school as irrelevant; this often interacts with course failure and academic struggles, creating a downward spiral of more absenteeism; and

4. Inaccurate information; students and families may underestimate how much school has been missed or may not have access to school data, may not understand the importance of attendance, or consider course completion on-line/at home enough.

The data demonstrates that the high levels of chronic absenteeism occurring in the 2021-22 school year were not an anomaly. Re-establishing a routine of attendance every day will require intentional, sustained, and systemic efforts at the local, State, and national level to address the disengagement and increased barriers to attendance occurring during the pandemic and in its aftermath (The Grad Partnership).

One of the main reasons why student engagement is so important is because the associated skills and habits—motivation, joy of learning, persistence, curiosity—set students up to thrive in college and their careers. When students are engaged, they are more likely to excel in core instruction and less likely to need academic interventions, which, in turn, leads to higher student achievement and increased attendance (Bowen, 2020).

Most educators aim for teacher-driven engagement. Many teaching programs encourage teacher-driven methods, such as building strong teacher-student relationships, delivering high-energy lectures, and using interactive games. Naturally, charismatic teachers often excel with these methods. But the truth is, student-driven engagement can be much more effective. These methods focus on creating challenging learning tasks and giving students the roles, responsibilities, and collaborative structures to engage in these tasks with their peers. Engagement comes from peer interactions and the challenge of the tasks, rather than primarily from interactions with the teacher.

With student-driven engagement:

- Students take on active roles and responsibilities (such as tracking their own progress, coaching peers);
- Classroom is often noisy as students problem solve and debate their ideas with one another;
- Teacher encourages students to rely on their peers and resources;
- Students build strong social bonds with one another;
- Teacher steps back to allow for productive struggle and tracks student progress;
- Limited direct instruction, which is mainly used to set up the learning task;
- Teacher focuses on creating challenging, interesting tasks that require students to engage with peers.

In a recent student summit in North Georgia (2023), comments showed that students are craving relationships with their teachers and that they want fewer digital assignments and more human interaction. They want their teachers to know who they are and to receive assignments that are relevant to their needs and interests. Having meaningful relationships with teachers with this type of engagement in the classroom will increase student attendance.

Relationships—both with teachers and peers—are critical. According to The Grad Partnership, the strongest universal strategy we have to address absenteeism is re-connecting students to school. Students are connected to school when:

- They believe there is an adult at school who knows and cares about them as a person.

- They have a supportive peer group.

- They are engaged in activities they find meaningful and that help others.

- They feel welcome in school for who they are. Relationships are at the heart of this.

Positive school-student relationships create a sense of belonging that inspires a student to actually want to attend. For example, involvement in after-school activities is known to increase attendance, and intentional efforts to connect students to activities have shown promising results. Culturally relevant and responsive instruction also sends a message that students' identities and cultures are valued. Mentoring programs also provide a caring adult in the school building who can advocate for the student. Surveys such as the Search Institute's Developmental Relationships survey are a good resource for establishing baselines about how students experience the adults in the school—a first step in working to foster more positive relationships. School leaders can also simply ask students to name the adults in the school whom they trust. There are multiple ways students can be organized to help each other, for example, multi-age or grade level advisory groups, peer mentors, and home room or advisory captains— where older students support a homeroom or advisory of younger students, i.e., 8th graders with 6th graders, or 12th graders with 9th graders, including encouraging their homeroom or advisory "team" to be in school every day. These programs have positive results for the student helpers as well as those being supported (The Grad Partnership).

Strong school-family relationships are also essential for developing a network of support that keeps students in school. Phone calls and home visits in response to absences are more effective than impersonal robocalls and texts, and being mindful that parents need to be trusted as partners in their child's education. School leaders can intentionally build a welcoming environment characterized by open and active communication, including providing information in families' first language. School events like Family Resource Nights not only support families but create trust and human connections with parents and guardians that can be activated when absences occur (The Grad Partnership).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Southeast RAC conducted a thorough assessment of the educational needs in the Southeast region and identified five priority areas that require immediate attention. These priority areas encompass the domains of discipline, literacy and mathematics achievement, teacher recruitment and retention, post-secondary education, and attendance.

The committee recognizes the utmost importance of adopting a holistic and supportive approach to discipline that not only addresses the surface-level behavior issues but also delves into the root causes, while concurrently promoting the overall well-being and success of students.

To enhance student performance in literacy and mathematics, evidence-based instructional strategies must be employed. The committee suggests a focus on professional development opportunities for teachers and the strategic utilization of technology to augment student engagement and improve learning outcomes.

Another pressing concern identified by the committee is the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. In order to attract and retain highly qualified educators, the committee advocates for the provision of competitive salaries and benefits, the establishment of mentorship and support programs for new teachers, and an emphasis on creating ongoing professional growth opportunities.

Regarding post-secondary education, the committee underscores the need to strengthen partnerships between K-12 schools, colleges, and universities to better align curriculum and support seamless transitions for students. Additionally, expanding access to career and technical education programs is recommended to ensure students are adequately prepared for the workforce.

Lastly, the committee highlights the criticality of prioritizing efforts to increase student attendance rates. They suggest implementing strategies such as positive reinforcement, targeted interventions for students with chronic absenteeism, and forging community partnerships to mitigate barriers.

In closing, the success of addressing these priority areas hinges upon collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and sustained support and resources. The committee emphasizes the necessity of ongoing communication and cooperation between SEAs, LEAs, schools, and the Comprehensive Centers to effectively implement the recommended strategies. Furthermore, data collection, analysis, and utilization are crucial for monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. The Southeast RAC urges education leaders to prioritize the collection and utilization of data to inform evidence-based decision-making. Lastly, it is imperative that sustained funding, professional development opportunities, and technical assistance are provided to facilitate the successful implementation of initiatives aimed at ameliorating the educational landscape of the Southeast region.

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Appendix A. Chart of Nominated, Recommended, and Serving RAC Members

Number of Individuals Nominated, Recommended, and Serving on the Southeast RAC

Region	Nominated	Recommended by the U.S. Department of Education	Declined	Resigned	Accepted, Serving
Southeast	19	13	0	0	13

Appendix B. List of RAC Members

Southeast RAC members represented local and state education agencies; institutions of higher education; parents; practicing educators, including classroom teachers; and organizations serving youth, educators, or both. Members included:

Regional Chair

- Dr. Omar Riaz, Assistant Superintendent, Miami-Dade Public Schools

RAC Members

- Ms. Yolonda Averett, Education Specialist II, Alabama State Department of Education
- Dr. Larry Collier, Coordinator of the MALE Scholarship Program, Alabama A&M University
- Mr. Ronda Gedward, Substitute Teacher
- Dr. Antonis Katsiyannis, Alumni Distinguished Professor, Clemson University
- Dr. Bronwyn Ragan-Martin, Deputy Superintendent of Rural Education and Innovation, Georgia Department of Education
- Dr. Berta Ríos, Chief Academic Officer, Albizu University
- Dr. Orletta Rush, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Jefferson County Schools
- Ms. Anna Barrett Smith, Parent Advocate
- Ms. Joanne Sweazey, Executive Director, The Hope Center for Autism, Inc.
- Dr. Lesley Thompson, Director of Exceptional Student Education, Monroe County School District
- Dr. Kyle Wagner, President¸ Northeastern Technical College
- Ms. Shana White, Senior Associate, Computer Science Equity and Justice Initiatives at the Kapor Center

Appendix C. Southeast Profile (Comprehensive)

The following profile shows recent data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education for the Southeast region, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Data for each state is included along with high-level data comparing information across the regions. The following topic areas are included:

- Information about Districts and Schools
- Student Enrollment Information
- Graduation Information
- Student Academic Information
- Student Non-Academic Information
- Teacher Information
- Teacher Qualifications
- Teacher Shortages
- Financial Resources
- Resources

Note that data includes the most recent tables available in July 2023. In some instances, data have not been disaggregated by jurisdiction so national data have been included as a reference point. Where appropriate, Reflection Questions have been provided for consideration.

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Overall Reflection Questions

- What is your overall reaction to the data presented?
  - *Is it what you expected?*
  - *If it was not what you expected, what surprised you?*
- What other data do you need to help you better understand the needs in your jurisdiction or region?
- Are the data available at the state level or do you have access to this data through another vehicle?
- How can the needs assessment help you attain this data?
- What do you believe are the top priorities facing your jurisdiction/region?
- Why do you believe these are the top priorities facing your jurisdiction?
- What input would you like to hear from other stakeholders?
- How will you collect that input?

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Information about Southeast Districts and Schools

Totals by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Operating Districts (2020-21)[1]	Total Number of Operating Public Schools (2020-21)[1]	Total Number of Charter Schools (2020-21)[2]	Total Number of Private Schools (Fall 2019)
Alabama	179	1,542	5	400
Florida	77	4,219	687	2,510
Georgia	241	2,311	98	860
Mississippi	155	1,042	7	180
North Carolina	348	2,683	200	760
South Carolina	102	1,266	81	430

Note 1: Profiles were prepared using the most recent publicly data available. The most recent set of private school data provided was fall 2019, whereas the tables used for reporting the districts and public/charter school data were updated for the 2020-21 school year.
Note 2: Operating schools/districts include all those providing services at the start of the reported school year.

Student Enrollment Information

Jurisdiction	Total Public School Enrollment (Fall 2019)	Public PreK-8 Enrollment (Fall 2021)	Public Grades 9-12 Enrollment (Fall 2021)	Enrollment in Private Schools
Alabama	748,274	528,264	220,010	76,430
Florida	2,833,186	1,959,161	874,025	461,840
Georgia	1,740,875	1,202,718	538,157	169,630
Mississippi	442,000	311,080	130,920	41,880
North Carolina	1,525,223	1,053,942	471,281	137,840
South Carolina	780,878	545,791	235,087	70,560

Note: Public schools include traditional public and charter schools.

3–5-year-old Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (% distribution by race/ethnicity) (2021)

Jurisdiction	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native	Two or More Races
Alabama	51.0%	54.0%	49.4%	40.0%	++	++	++	48.9%
Florida	57.1%	59.7%	56.8%	53.6%	48.7%	++	++	59.4%
Georgia	57.1%	61.2%	58.1%	43.8%	56.1%	++	++	56.6%
Mississippi	52.3%	53.5%	53.7%	30.0%	++	++	++	52.2%
North Carolina	51.2%	54.9%	51.3%	45.6%	39.3%	++	60.4%	45.7%
South Carolina	50.9%	55.8%	43.1%	51.3%	++	++	++	40.3%

++Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

Public Elementary and Secondary School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (% distribution by total) (Fall 2021)

Jurisdiction	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Two or More Races
Alabama	52.6%	32.0%	10.0%	1.5%	0.1%	0.9%	2.9%
Florida	36.1%	21.3%	35.5%	2.8%	0.2%	0.2%	4.0%
Georgia	36.7%	36.4%	17.6%	4.5%	0.1%	0.2%	4.4%
Mississippi	43.1%	47.1%	4.6%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%	3.7%
North Carolina	44.9%	24.9%	19.8%	3.8%	0.1%	1.1%	5.2%
South Carolina	48.4%	32.0%	12.0%	1.7%	0.1%	0.3%	5.4%

Number of Students by School Locale (Fall 2019)

Jurisdiction	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
Alabama	173,339	168,148	106,793	295,955
Florida	791,707	1,577,080	123,663	365,875
Georgia	259,517	839,180	169,583	501,377
Mississippi	44,437	70,929	126,829	223,807
North Carolina	481,963	345,601	159,269	573,517
South Carolina	139,942	296,937	80,819	269,071

English Language Learners (Fall 2020)

Jurisdiction	Total	Percentage of Total Enrollment
United States	4,963,388	10.3%
Alabama	32,630	4.6%
Florida	264,546	9.7%
Georgia	125,963	7.5%
Mississippi	13,127	3.0%
North Carolina	114,901	7.7%
South Carolina	42,731	5.7%

Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (2019–2020)[a]

Jurisdiction	Total	Percentage of Total Enrollment
United States	26,000,645[a]	52.1%[a]
Alabama	409,431	55.0%
Florida	1,540,439	53.9%
Georgia	1,056,179	59.7%
Mississippi	348,462	74.8%
North Carolina	856,466	57.8%
South Carolina	497,221	63.2%

[a]For the United States data, total includes imputation for nonreporting states.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Alabama

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	X	44	1,082	210	X	2,024	131
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	X	69	1,016	227	X	2,477	71
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	700	643	32,823	6,686	77	48,142	2,241

X: Data suppressed due to small size.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Florida

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	25	283	3,157	6,122	20	5,563	542
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	27	450	4,458	7,021	17	7,797	894
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	1,058	5,306	97,491	127,959	484	141,620	14,675

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Georgia

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	7	304	2,927	1,260	10	4,111	163
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	15	337	3,044	1,581	5	3,969	397
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	425	4,418	84,550	33,675	178	81,419	8,607

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – Mississippi

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	13	X	689	57	X	810	40
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	4	34	1,405	120	3	2,185	163
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	139	349	30,348	2,017	27	28,367	2,001

X: Data suppressed due to small size.

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – North Carolina

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	99	230	2,192	1,648	9	4,517	240
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	178	302	2,195	1,839	16	5,269	440
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	2,571	2,901	56,617	31,293	190	79,772	9,596

Special Education Enrollment Numbers by Race/Ethnicity and Age Group Served under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) – South Carolina

Age Group	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
Ages Birth-2 (Served under IDEA, Part C)	16	68	1,872	577	10	3,473	542
Ages 3-5 (Early Childhood) (Served under IDEA Part B)	13	76	1,427	572	3	2,610	249
Ages 5 (School Age) through 21 (Served under IDEA Part B)	347	757	39,498	9,980	101	45,690	4,992

Student Enrollment Reflection Questions

- Based on the number of students by school locale, where are the majority of your students located?
- Looking at the enrollment distribution by race percentages, how diverse is your student population?
- How does the percentage of students qualifying as ELLs in your jurisdiction compare to the overall percentage of ELLs throughout the United States?
- How does the percentage of students qualifying for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) in your jurisdiction compare to the overall percentage of students qualifying for FRPL throughout the United States?

Graduation Information[b, c, d, e, f]

Demographic	United States	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Florida	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Total ACGR for all Students	87%	91%	90%	84%	90%	88%	88%	82%
Percent Students with Disabilities (2019-2020)	71%	69%	83%	70%	83%	55%	72%	56%
Percent English Learner (2019-2020)	71%	72%	86%	62%	86%	62%	71%	81%
Percent Economically Disadvantaged (2019-2020)	81%	86%	87%	80%	87%	86%	82%	76%
Homeless Enrolled (2019-2020)	Not Available	74%	80%	66%	80%	75%	72%	64%
Foster Care (2019-2020)	Not Available	67%	57%	++	57%	65%	57	44%
Private High School Graduates (2018-2019)	340,610	5,000	27,080	11,100	27,080	2,980	26,890	3,400

++Reporting standards not met.

ACGR by Race/Ethnicity % (2019-2020)[g]

Jurisdiction	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or More Races
Alabama	92%	88%	88%	95%	93%	92%
Florida	92%	87%	90%	98%	84%	91%
Georgia	87%	81%	78%	93%	76%	86%
Mississippi	90%	86%	84%	92%	81%	86%
North Carolina	91%	85%	82%	94%	85%	85%
South Carolina	85%	78%	80%	93%	81%	–

– Not available.

[b] Numbers are the public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by selected student characteristics for 2019-2020.

[c] The time when students are identified as having certain characteristics varies by state. Depending on the state, a student may be included in a category if the relevant characteristic is reported in 9th-grade data, if the characteristic is reported in 12-grade data, or if it is reported at any point during the student's high school years.

[d] Students who met the state criteria for classification as economically disadvantaged.

[e] Students who meet the definition of English Learners as outlined in the Department of Education ED*Facts* workbook. For more information, see EDFacts Workbook.

[f] Students identified as children with disabilities under the IDEA.

[g] States either report data for a combined "Asian/Pacific Islander" group or report the "Asian" and "Pacific Islander" groups separately. Total represents either a single value reported by the state for "Asian/Pacific Islander" or an aggregation of separate values reported for "Asian" and "Pacific Islander." "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes the "Filipino" group. Number represents the Total reported Asian/Pacific Islander.

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Graduation Rates Reflection Questions

- Do you collect data on 5-year graduation cohorts? If so, how does it compare to the 4-year cohort ACGR?
- Which, if any, graduation rate would you prioritize to increase over the next 5 years?

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Student Academic Information

To compare students nationally, we have provided results from the fourth and eighth grade math and reading National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results. NAEP—a congressionally mandated large-scale assessment administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—consists of print and digital assessments in various subject areas. Three of these subjects—mathematics, reading, and science—are assessed most frequently and reported at the state and select district level, usually for grades 4 and 8. The Nation's Report Card provides results on student performance based on gender, race/ethnicity, public or nonpublic school, teacher experience, and hundreds of other factors.

NAEP assessment results are reported as average scores on a 0-500 scale (reading, mathematics at grades 4 and 8, U.S. history, and geography) or on a 0-300 scale (mathematics at grade 12, science, writing, technology and engineering literacy, and civics). These scale scores, derived from student responses to assessment questions, summarize the overall level of performance attained by that student. Scale scores for individual students are not reported, but summary statistics describing scale scores for groups of students (demographic, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.) are reported. More information about NAEP can be found at https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/.

Academic Achievement: NAEP (2022) National and State Averages

Jurisdiction	4th Grade Math	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Math	8th Grade Reading
United States	235	216	273	259
Alabama	230	213	264	251
Florida	241	225	271	260
Georgia	235	216	271	260
Mississippi	234	217	266	253
North Carolina	236	216	274	256
South Carolina	234	216	269	254

Student Academic Factors Reflection Questions
- How did students in your jurisdiction compare to the national average of students on the NAEP results?
- Given the national average NAEP score, what goal(s) would you set for your students to achieve on the next NAEP administration? For example, would you like the results to stay stable or would you want to see a 3-point increase on 4th grade math? What do you need to achieve this goal?

Non-Academic Information

Non-academic factors for students include suspension and expulsion rates. Additionally, the most recently reported data regarding students who have carried firearms to schools and have experienced bullying (both on school property and electronically) have been included.

Percentage of Students Suspended or Expelled from Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by Gender and Ethnicity (2017–2018)[i]

Percent who Received Out-of-School Suspensions[j]

Demographic	United States	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Total	5.0%	7.3%	5.3%	6.5%	10.2%	7.2%	10.4%
Male	6.8%	9.9%	7.3%	8.9%	13.5%	10.0%	13.9%
Female	3.0%	4.6%	3.2%	4.1%	6.8%	4.3%	6.7%
White	3.4%	4.1%	4.2%	3.4%	5.0%	4.3%	6.1%
Black	12.3%	14.5%	9.6%	11.7%	15.7%	14.2%	18.3%
Hispanic	4.0%	2.7%	3.4%	3.9%	4.5%	5.2%	5.4%
Asian	1.0%	1.5%	1.1%	1.1%	2.2%	1.2%	1.7%
Pacific Islander	4.9%	4.8%	3.5%	3.2%	2.6%	5.9%	7.7%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	6.9%	4.4%	5.1%	5.2%	6.9%	12.4%	10.1%
Two or More Races	5.5%	3.1%	6.0%	6.0%	5.5%	8.3%	10.3%

Percent Expelled[k]

Demographic	United States	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Total	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%	0.4%
Male	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.1%	0.6%
Female	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%
White	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%
Black	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%	0.8%	0.7%	0.1%	0.8%
Hispanic	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Asian	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Demographic	United States	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.9%	0.1%	0.2%
Two or More Races	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%

[i] Data by race/ethnicity excludes students with disabilities served only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (i.e., those not receiving services under IDEA).

[j] An out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a student is temporarily removed from his or her regular school (either in person or virtual) for disciplinary purposes for at least half a day (but less than the remainder of the school year) to another setting (e.g., home or behavior center). Out-of-school suspensions include removals with or without the continuation of educational services.

[k] Expulsions are actions taken by a local education agency to remove a student from his or her regular school (either in person or virtual) for disciplinary purposes, with or without the continuation of education services, for the remainder of the school year or longer, in accordance with local education agency policy. Expulsions also include removals resulting from violations of the Gun Free Schools Act that are modified to less than 365 days.

Firearms (2019-2020)

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Students Who Brought Firearms to or Possessed Firearms at School	Number of Students Who did this per 100,000 Students, Enrolled
United States	2,431	4.8
Alabama	17	2.3
Florida	188	6.6
Georgia	137	7.7
Mississippi	14	3.0
North Carolina	88	5.6
South Carolina	48	6.1

Bullying (2017)

Jurisdiction	Percentage of Public School Students Bullied on School Property[l]	Percentage of Public School Students Electronically Bullied[m]
United States	19.0%	14.9%
Alabama	–	–
Florida	14.3%	11.6%
Georgia	–	–
Mississippi	–	–
North Carolina	18.7%	13.9%
South Carolina	21.5%	13.6%

– Not available.

[l] Bullying was defined for respondents as "when one or more students tease, threaten, spread rumors about, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again." "On school property" was not defined for survey respondents.

[m] Includes "being bullied through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting" for 2011 through 2015, and "being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media" for 2017.

Student Non-Academic Factors Reflection Questions

- What policies are in place to address recent issues of school violence?
- How does your state compare to the national average? Is this a number you would like to change? What other information do you need to make an informed decision about this issue?

Teacher Information

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Public School Teachers (Fall 2019)	Pupil/Teacher Ratio (Fall 2020)	Teachers in Private Schools
Alabama	42,022	17.7	6,360
Florida	166,002	17.2	37,480
Georgia	117,837	15.0	17,030
Mississippi	31,578	14.8	3,650
North Carolina	100,777	15.5	13,360
South Carolina	53,556	14.7	5,600

Teacher Qualifications

The following table includes the highest degree earned and years of full-time teaching experience by state and United States. Data from 2011-2012 was the latest data reported at the national level.

Jurisdiction	Degree Levels, Percentage – Less than Bachelor's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Bachelor's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Master's (2011-2012)	Degree Levels, Percentage – Education Specialist or Doctor's (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – Less than 3 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – 3 to 9 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – 10 to 20 (2011-2012)	Years Fulltime Experience – Over 20 (2011-2012)
United States	3.8%	39.9%	47.7%	8.7%	9.0%	33.3%	36.4%	21.3%
Alabama	3.8!%	34.5%	52.8%	8.9%	8.0%	30.9%	39.2%	21.9%
Florida	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Georgia	3.4%!	29.5%	43.5%	23.6%	6.3%	34.2%	39.7%	19.7%
Mississippi	5.3%	54.4%	35.2%	5.1%	10.3%	41.0%	30.5%	18.2%
North Carolina	4.1%!	54.2%	33.8%	7.8%	8.4%	35.8%	34.8%	21.1%
South Carolina	3.0%!	28.8%	57.9%	10.3%	8.4%	30.5%	32.3%	28.9%

++ Reporting standards not met. Data may be suppressed because the response rate is under 50 percent, there are too few cases for a reliable estimate, or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers Enrolled in Traditional and Alternative Programs

Jurisdiction	Number Enrolled in a Teacher Preparation Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Traditional Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Alternative Program-(Institute of Higher Education [IHE]) (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Enrollment by Enrolled in an Alternative Program-(Not IHE based) (2019-2020)
United States	590,046	69.9%	8.3%	21.9%
Alabama	5,784	78.8%	21.2%	0.0%
Florida	13,464	62.6%	14.8%	22.6%
Georgia	16,886	83.5%	0.0%	16.5%
Mississippi	5,851	51.0%	45.4%	3.6%
North Carolina	18,579	53.0%	14.9%	32.2%
South Carolina	7,916	72.1%	0.3%	27.6%

Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers Who Completed Traditional and Alternative Programs

Jurisdiction	Number completed a teacher preparation program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in Traditional Program (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in an Alternative Program-(IHE based) (2019-2020)	Percentage Distribution of Completers in an Alternative Program-(Not IHE based) (2019-2020)
United States	151,138	76.8%	11.4%	11.8%
Alabama	1,862	78.6%	21.4%	0.0%
Florida	4,555	60.6%	23.2%	16.2%
Georgia	4,341	83.4%	0.0%	16.6%
Mississippi	1,639	63.8%	28.2%	8.0%
North Carolina	4,228	64.7%	16.1%	19.2%
South Carolina	2,089	83.8%	0.7%	15.6%

Teacher Information Reflection Questions

- Given national issues of teacher shortages, where are the priority areas in your state?
- What teacher preparation institutions or alternative programs does your state offer? Are these programs going to fulfill your educator needs in the next 5 years?

Financial Resources by State

Description	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – Federal (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$1,510,373	$4,841,583	$3,068,755	$1,035,288	$2,093,422	$1,282,235
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – State (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$5,187,636	$14,072,267	$10,706,159	$2,493,756	$10,637,221	$6,037,237
Revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education – Local (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$2,936,726	$16,880,257	$11,324,643	$1,848,093	$4,381,850	$4,844,412
Amounts and percentage changes of inflation-adjusted state, local, and federal revenues per pupil (FY2021)	$13,116	$12,822	$14,508	$12,148	$11,305	$15,863
Percentage change from FY20-21	9.6%	5.6%	5.3%	10.0%	5.0%	9.2%
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction – Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$7,880,052	$30,214,859	$20,946,669	$4,452,945	$15,921,684	$9,308,454
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction – Instruction (In thousands) (FY2021)	$4,668,795	$18,346,227	$12,908,771	$2,550,811	$10,115,531	$5,272,479

Description	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Mississippi	North Carolina	South Carolina
Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education by function, and subfunction - Support Services (In thousands) (FY2021)	$2,972,920	$10,607,515	$7,141,474	$1,678,288	$5,209,576	$3,655,094
Current expenditures per pupil – Total (In thousands) (FY2021)	$10,728	$10,823	$12,008	$10,606	$10,519	$12,139
Title I expenditures per pupil – (In thousands) (FY2021)	$360	$310	$316	$506	$302	$341
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$7,880,052	$30,214,859	$20,946,669	$4,452,945	$15,921,684	$9,308,454
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Instruction and Instruction-related total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$5,007,887	$20,258,919	$13,696,815	$2,757,183	$10,724,689	$5,835,186
Salaries and wages, and employee benefits for public elementary and secondary education, by function and state or jurisdiction – Support Services Total (In thousands) (FY 2021)	$2,633,829	$8,694,824	$6,080,430	$1,471,916	$4,600,419	$3,092,387

Financial Resources Reflection Questions

- Looking at the subfunction allocations, are expenditures allocated proportionately in the correct places?
- How do educator salaries in your state compare to other professional careers?

Appendix D. Summary of Stakeholder Input

Data Source	# of Responses	Time Period	Topics by Category
Public Comments	149	August 18, 2023 – October 15, 2023	• Equitable Funding • Student/Teacher Mental Health and Well-Being • Rural Education • Attendance • Academic Achievement • Teacher Recruitment and Retention • Family Engagement • Discipline • Technology • School Safety • Students with Disabilities
Focus Group	12	October 6, 2023	• Teacher Recruitment and Retention in the Region
Input from REL Governing Board	1	September 15, 2023 – October 10, 2023	• Ensuring culturally responsive and inclusive practices • Recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators and support staff • Offering programming to meet the holistic needs of students, starting as early as possible • Addressing the learning needs of historical and current marginalized students without subjecting them to low-quality educational practices