



ACTION PLANNING WORKSHEET

Alabama Action Plan to Help More of its Young People Graduate High School, Ready for College, Work & Life

Name of Summit State or Community: Alabama

Date and Location of Summit: March 5, 2009 Embassy Suites Hotel

Geographical Area Covered by Action Plan: State of Alabama
(i.e. which county(ies), school district(s), etc.)

Date Submitted: 5/22/09

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I. Building Knowledge: Understanding Your State's or Community's Dropout & College-Readiness Challenges

(See Part 2 of Grad Nation, pp. 22-41, for help with this area of planning.)

1. What is your state's or community's current graduation rate? (please cite the source and methodology)

The State Department of Education reports that Alabama had a dropout rate of 2.47% in 2007 and a graduation rate of 66.2% in 2006 (<http://www.alsde.edu/PublicDataReports/Default.aspx>). Alabama currently uses the NCS/ US Department of Education's methodology. However, Alabama will use the NGA methodology in 2011.

The Southern Education Foundation reports that Alabama had a dropout rate of 41.4% in 2007 (The Southern Education Foundation, High School Dropouts: Alabama's Number One Education & Economic Problem. Atlanta, Georgia: SEF, Inc., 2008). SEF uses NCLB standards for calculating high school graduation rates. The calculations are explained in the "What's New" section of www.southerneducation.org.

2. What does both national and local data indicate about your state's or community's graduation and college-going rates over the last few years (e.g. over the last 2, 5 and 10 years)? Have the schools' rates been improving or getting worse? How do your local statistics compare with your state and the nation as a whole?

According to the Alabama State Department of Education, Alabama's dropout rate has slightly improved in recent years (2003: 3.5%; 2004: 3.3%; 2005: 2.8%; 2006: 2.5%; 2007: 2.5). These statistics show that Alabama has the lowest dropout rate of the 12 southeastern states and has the 7th lowest dropout rate in the nation.

3. Please describe what efforts have or will be taken to better understand the issues from key perspectives, such as parents and young people themselves. Explain what data analysis, surveys, interviews or other efforts have or will be implemented to build your knowledge base of who drops out, from which schools, when, and why. What is known, and what do you still seek to learn?

During the 2009 legislative session, a bill passed that raises the dropout age in Alabama from sixteen to seventeen. Also, Senate Joint Resolution 24 was passed. It creates the Alabama Select Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts. The commission will study the problems and patterns of high school dropouts in the state and their educational and economic impact on the state and local communities. The Commission will also examine an array of issues, including strategies, programs and support services that help students graduate from high school.

II. **Rallying Your State or Community: Getting Buy-In to Address the Crisis**

(See Part 1 of Grad Nation, pp. 8-21, for help with this area of planning.)

1. What key data and message points have you developed around the issue to secure commitment from your community's and state's leaders and to mobilize the general public? What's the impact of the dropout challenge on your economy, state or city budget, social services, employers, post-secondary institutions, etc? If you don't yet have these data and message points, what are your plans to obtain them?

The State Department of Education's data as well as The Southern Education's were used to help participants better understand the dropout problem as it relates to their area of the state. The primary message of the summit was the relevance of unique, community-specific planning for dropout prevention and the importance of implementing nationally recognized best practices. Summit participants were instructed to encourage local leaders in their hometowns to become engaged in developing a community-wide approach to dropout prevention.

2. Who is serving or can serve as your state's or community's champion and chief spokesperson around the high school dropout issue? If multiple spokespeople are needed, which leaders – elected officials, business leaders, other local influentials – will be recruited?

Alabama Senator Arthur Orr is an outspoken leader regarding the importance of high school dropout prevention. He introduced the recently passed bill that increased the dropout age from sixteen to seventeen. Dr. Kay Atchison-Warfield from the Alabama State Department of Education is also a statewide leader and champion of the dropout issue. Dr. Shelley Stewart and Phil Christian from the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation are active leaders, as well. Appointments will soon be made to the recently created Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts. Those appointees will likely be the spokespeople for the dropout issue in Alabama.

3. What is your state's or community's vision statement for your young people, related to their successful completion of high school and preparation for college and/or work? What is your quantifiable long-term goal (e.g. 10-year) for your dropout and college-readiness challenges?

Alabama's vision is to ensure that young people across the state have individualized, wraparound support. The newly created commission will establish more specific goals and timelines once people are appointed to fill the positions.

III. Identifying Solutions: Considering and Prioritizing Potential Solutions to Comprehensively Address Your Local Dropout Challenge

The Alliance advocates four focus areas that we believe to be key in addressing the dropout issue at the state and local levels: **transforming schools** including through increasing curricular rigor and relevance, **supporting young people** holistically with wraparound services, **developing effective policies**, and **employing data systems** as a dropout prevention tool.

(See Part 3 of *Grad Nation*, pp. 42-75, for help with this area of planning.)

1. Please identify your highest-priority strategies and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **transform the schools** that the majority of your local dropouts attend. For each priority, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance it? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

One of the highest priorities of post-summit activities is to encourage the implementation of the Community School Model in middle and high schools throughout Alabama. Efforts have already been made to support Alabama communities in this endeavor. On April 28th and 29th Dr. Robert Balfanz presented Community Action, Linking Leaders to thirty communities across Alabama. Each community assembled local leaders from various sectors and participated in the presentation via the state's technologically advanced distance learning system, ACCESS. Participants from each community were able to actively participate by asking questions and brain storming with other communities. Dr. Balfanz answered questions and helped communities develop effective plans.

2. Please identify your highest-priority strategies, programs, policies, and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **support young people**. How will more young people, particularly those most in need, receive wraparound supports in and out of school, such as tutoring, afterschool programs, mentors, social services, health care and others? For each priority, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance it? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

The highest priority is to encourage communities to create local task forces charged with implementing action plans specific to the needs of their community while receiving support from the state level. More young people will receive the wraparound support they need if community organizations and working collaboratively and not duplicating services. The local task forces will help community stakeholders better understand what resources are available to them and how these resources can be best utilized. The summit follow-up session, Community Action, Linking Leaders (discussed above), helped support the efforts of local community task forces. Another session will be scheduled for later this year to follow-up on the action plans and provide further support to communities.

3. Please identify your highest-priority policies or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **develop effective policies** at the local or state level that encourage high school completion and college readiness. For each, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance this priority? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

The highest policy reform is the recently increased graduation rate and the Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts (both discussed above). In the next six months appointees will be made to the Commission, and the Commission will begin studying dropout related issues

within the state. The State Department of Education is working to increase the effectiveness of programs targeting at-risk youth, such as the Alabama Student Assistance Plan (ASAP), Preparing Alabama Students for Success (PASS), and the Governor's High Hopes program.

4. Please identify your highest-priority strategies, programs, policies, and/or reforms consistent with *Grad Nation* that your state or community will pursue in order to **employ data systems** that identify those young people most at-risk for dropping out and drive appropriate supports and services. For each, what would you need to do in the next 6-12 months to advance this priority? Is anything already underway locally to support it? What support or information would help you make better progress?

Establishing an early warning system is a priority that will help improve the support and service that young people in Alabama need. For instance, Alabama is focusing on a reading initiative, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), which works to improve reading comprehension. After the implementation of this program, Alabama ranked number one in the nation for fourth grade reading scores. This initiative and others can be used to facilitate an effective early warning system.

IV. Organizing for Long-Term Success: Getting the Right People on Board, Committing to Action, Ensuring Accountability, Securing Resources, and Tracking Progress over Time

(See Part 4 of Grad Nation, pp. 76-90, for help with this area of planning.)

1. What group or committee will coordinate and sustain the work outlined in this action plan? What leaders does it have from various sectors – business, education, nonprofit, government, faith, etc.? (Please submit group's roster along with this plan.) Who else is needed? Who convenes the group, how often, and what sub-groups or committees does your effort need?

The Governor's Dropout Prevention Task Force will work to sustain the goals outlined in this action plan. Members of the Task Force include the following:

Judge David Breland, Breland Consulting, Retired District Court Judge
Cheryl Bumpus, State Farm, Leadership Development Associate
Phil Christian, Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, Executive Director
Liz Cochran, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, State Youth Coordinator
Charlie Colvin, River Region United Way, Director
Dr. Marquita Davis, Department of Children's Affairs, Director
Mark Dixon, Governor's Office, Deputy Policy Director
Mitch Edwards, Alabama Department of Education, Communications Director
Jessica Fair, GFBCI, Community Outreach Coordinator
Lori Frazier, Children's Trust Fund, Projects Director
Sydney Hoffman, GFBCI, Director
Judge Brian Huff, Birmingham Family Court, Judge
Sue Johnson, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Birmingham Director
Nakia Kyler, GFBCI, AmeriCorps VISTA
Carol McArthur, AmeriCorps, Butler County Director
Jeremiah Newell, Mobile Area Education Foundation, Program Director
Gary Pledger, AT&T Alabama, Director/ Chief of Staff
Sandy Powell, Alabama Department of Public Health, Adolescent & School Health
Cheryl Sabel, Southern Education Foundation, Independent Consultant
Justice Patti Smith, Alabama Supreme Court, Justice
Sherman Suitts, Vulcan Materials, Vice President
Linda Tilly, VOICES, Director
Dr. Kay Atchison Warfield, Alabama Department of Education, Prevention and Support Services

Zoa White, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Mentor Alabama State Program
Director

The Task Force was created to assist in planning the summit as well as to encourage various sectors in communities throughout the state to become involved. The Task Force also participated in the summit follow-up session. The Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts will likely become the primary coordinator for dropout prevention issues in the state.

2. What financial, human, and other resources are needed in order to begin acting on this plan? What resources are currently available, what will potentially need to be blended, and what new resources will need to be sought to do this work? Who might help secure additional resources to fill the gaps, and/or what funders (or others) may be approached? Will your state or community set a resource goal along with the outcome goal?

Positions on the Commission need to be filled. This should occur in the next month. The Commission will work with organizations already in place to begin implementation of the action plan. The Commission will likely use Grad Nation to help further research efforts.

Business such as Vulcan Materials, AT&T, State Farm, and others could be potential funders once the Commission establishes an action plan.

3. How will your community or state evaluate its dropout prevention efforts to ensure it is making a difference? What is the plan to monitor and track the progress being made on its developed goals? How will you maintain visibility around the local dropout prevention issue by reporting to the public on the progress being made?

The state will switch to NGA methodology for computing dropout rates in 2011. The State Department of Education will publish exemplary dropout prevention efforts by communities and schools in its monthly education news letter.

V. Staying Connected to the America's Promise Alliance: Identifying Long-term Interests, Priorities, and Points of Alignment

1. As part of our Alliance's goal to reach 15 million young people with more supports (i.e the Five Promises) by 2012, America's Promise has committed to resourcing and advocating for certain strategic priorities. Together, we are always looking for states and communities that share similar interests and that may provide effective models for policy and practice, investment opportunities and other points of alignment, including possible technical assistance from our Alliance partners. Please describe if your action plan has strategies specific to:
 - a. Focusing on the middle school years, especially providing service-learning and career exploration opportunities in and out of school. The local task forces are encouraged to focus on middle school years because those years are crucial in determining if a student will graduate.
 - b. Improving young people's access to quality health care, including promotion of SCHIP and Medicaid public health insurance programs. The plan includes this strategy by encouraging health officers to become actively engaged in their local task forces.
 - c. Creating community hubs (e.g. schools, afterschool programs, community centers) where coordinated wraparound supports are available to young people and their families. The action plan encourages communities to assemble their task forces. The task force then meets where it is most convenient for the participants.

- d. Engaging parents and caregivers to increase graduation and college readiness rates. Parents, especially PTA members, are encouraged to participate on the local task forces.
- e. Supporting young people in foster care so they graduate from high school prepared for college, work and life. Organizations that provide this type of support are actively recruited to participate on the local task forces, i.e. Big brothers Big Sisters.
- f. Developing young people's financial literacy. The plan does not have a specific provision for financial literacy.

If your plan does not include any of the above but your state or community has strong interest in developing one or more of these strategies, please note accordingly.

Resources for financial literacy.

2. How can the America's Promise Alliance best support your state or community with the implementation of this dropout prevention plan? The Alliance is interested in hearing how we can best assist you in your dropout prevention efforts, including resources we can provide, relationships we can facilitate, and any other needs your community may have.

America's Promise Alliance, through the summit initiative, has helped Alabama realize the importance of dropout prevention and college readiness. The summit was a great success, and many communities around the state are productively developing action plans to provide wraparound support to their young people.

The Grad Nation Guidebook had been an invaluable resource. America's Promise Alliance can best support us by continuing to provide nationally recognized best practices and breaking them down into a user-friendly guidebook.