A Comprehensive Education Study
(Academic Audit Report)
The City of Fairhope

The Akribos Group

Education Solutions

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Executive Summary

In November 2015, the Fairhope City Council contracted with the Akribos Group and Education Solutions to conduct an academic audit of the five Fairhope schools. The city council asked that the audit answer the following questions:

- What do Fairhope schools need to do to perform at the level of the top ten Alabama school systems?
- What resources would be needed for the schools to perform at that level?
- How do the costs of the funding provided by the city to the schools compare to the benefits?

This Academic Audit Report provides answers to those questions. It includes a description of the performance measures used; an overview of the work of each Fairhope school; a description of the practices, both general and specific, found in the top ten school systems; a cost-benefit comparison of city funds provided to the schools; specific recommendations to move Fairhope schools to the level of the top ten Alabama systems and resources needed; and four options, in addition to leaving the current structure intact, to provide more community involvement in and ownership of Fairhope schools.

Members of the Education Solutions team visited all Fairhope schools and met with leadership teams. Team members reviewed each school's student achievement and that of all schools in the top ten school systems. Each Fairhope school's principal and leadership team were unfailingly welcoming and helpful, as were Baldwin County personnel.

The top ten Alabama school systems consistently work to increase student learning, and they exhibit certain common characteristics. Leaders and teachers in the top ten systems work together to implement the following research-based *Five Critical Practices* that also correlate with Alabama Plan 2020. A discussion of how the top ten school systems implement the following critical practices is included in this report, as well as specific examples from individual systems that are relevant for Fairhope schools.

Critical Practice 1: Focus on Direction
Critical Practice 2: Build a Powerful Organization
Critical Practice 3: Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action
Critical Practice 4: Give Life to Data
Critical Practice 5: Lead Learning

The top ten Alabama school systems *all* demonstrate *all* of the Five Critical Practices.

Detailed recommendations are found in the Recommendations section of this report, but in summary, recommendations center around teacher and leader

learning, the use of teacher time, and certain instructional methods. The major recommendations are:

- Professional development for teachers and leaders.
- Time for teacher collaboration to ensure higher levels of student learning, including specific ways to use the collaborative time.
- School and organization data meetings.
- New personnel.
- Specific instructional strategies.
- Benchmarking or learning from other schools.

Some of the recommendations require more resources than others. Some require no additional funding. The recommendation that will require the most resources is time for teacher collaboration. All new personnel recommended, with the exception of an instructional and data leader, are to support teacher collaborative time.

The report includes five organizational options. The City Council requested that three of them be reviewed – leaving the current structure intact, creating a school tax district, and creating an independent school system. In addition, we have outlined two new ideas for increased local control of Fairhope schools – obtaining a school flexibility contract with the State Board of Education and creating a charter school organization. Each of these options is discussed in detail in the Options to Increase Community Involvement in and Ownership of Fairhope Schools section.

Fairhope schools' leaders and teachers are working hard every day to provide students with the skills and abilities they need to be successful academically and personally. Outstanding teaching and high-level learning can be seen throughout the five Fairhope schools. At the same time, there are always opportunities for improvement, but those opportunities require decisions, planning, and action. So, while we want to celebrate the remarkable efforts of Fairhope educators, we also want to provide recommendations for improvement. We are quite confident that, with the experience and expertise found within Fairhope schools and the strong and vital community support, Fairhope schools will take the actions required to achieve their goals.

Introduction

This audit provides an examination of the Fairhope School Feeder Pattern, reviewing student achievement and instructional processes, as well as organizational performance. During the audit process, Education Solutions performed an independent examination, including site visits to schools.

An academic audit is a description of the existing state of a school or system's instruction. An additional component of the Fairhope audit is the inclusion of descriptions of a number of the practices of the top ten consistently highest performing systems in the state. The audit also includes specific examples of best practices exemplified by the top ten school systems.

Another section of the report considers the costs and benefits for the funds the City of Fairhope provides to the Fairhope schools. The academic audit concludes with recommended actions to move the Fairhope schools into the top ten and the resources needed to implement the recommendations.

Finally, we include a summary of five possible options to increase local control of the Fairhope schools.

The result of the audit is a series of targeted recommendations for the Fairhope City Council and the Fairhope Education Advisory Committee.

Performance Measures

To simulate a Fairhope school system, we combined data from the schools in the Fairhope High School feeder pattern. We also compared grade level and subject area data with those from the top ten school systems.

Demographics

We analyzed FY 2015 demographic data for the top ten systems and for the hypothetical Fairhope system. For the poverty subgroup, we used FY 2014 data because of recent changes in the procedures for obtaining free/reduced lunch counts, which reduces the accuracy of 2015 data for this subgroup.

ACT Aspire Results (Reading, Math, and Science)

Spring 2015 results of the ACT Aspire assessments in reading, math, and science are presented in terms of the percent of students scoring at four levels of proficiency (needs support, close, ready, and exceeding), of which the top two categories are considered proficient. We analyzed the results for the top ten systems and for a hypothetical Fairhope system, which we constructed from the results for Fairhope feeder schools, weighted by enrollment.

ACT College Readiness Results (English, Social Studies, Math, Science)

We presented spring 2015 results in terms of the percent of students meeting the ACT standards of college readiness for freshman courses in English, social studies, math, and science (50% chance of making a B, 75% chance of making a C). We analyzed the results for the top ten systems and for a hypothetical Fairhope system, based on the performance of Fairhope High School.

Advanced Placement Data

Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings in Fairhope High School during the 2014 school year, as derived from information provided by the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) to the State of Alabama, were reviewed and compared to the state's offerings. Fairhope's AP success rates were compared with those of the top ten systems.

Core Expenditures Per Student

We compared Baldwin County System's FY 2014 core expenditures per student with those of Alabama's top-ten school systems. Core academic expenditures include all operating expenditures except the auxiliary categories (mainly food service and transportation), which are removed because they would distort academic comparisons.

Criteria for Top Ten School Systems

We identified for study purposes the schools that are among the ten highest performing school systems in Alabama. All public schools exist within a local school system, and their performance depends on strong leadership within the classroom, the school, and the system as a whole. Strong leadership at all three levels produces consistently high student performance in all schools. The data show that while a number of school systems can produce one or a few strong schools, only those that systematically apply best practices are able to achieve consistently strong schools. The top ten school systems identified for this study exhibit uniformly high performance.

We identified the top ten school systems by ranking all systems according to the following:

- The 14 system-level results on 2015 ACT Aspire Tests in Reading and Math, grades 3-8, and Science, grades 5 and 7
- The 4 system-level results on 2015 ACT College Readiness assessments in English, Social Studies, Math, and Science

Fairhope Schools

Overview

Members of the Education Solutions team visited all Fairhope schools, met with leadership teams, and conducted walkthroughs. Team members also reviewed each school's student achievement and that of all schools in the top ten school systems. The team analyzed the results of the ACT Aspire assessments in reading, math, and science and of the ACT standards of college readiness for freshman courses in English, social studies, math, and science for the top ten systems and for Fairhope schools. The team also reviewed Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings and success rates in Fairhope High School and compared them with those of the top ten systems.

Fairhope's rankings (shown in Appendix B) were sometimes among the highest ten systems, and in all but five cases were in the top fifteen. In eleven cases, Fairhope ranked higher than one or more of the top ten, but never outranked a top-four system (Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, Madison City, and Homewood). Reading was Fairhope's weakest performance; Fairhope's performance was strongest in science and the college readiness measures. Appendix C shows that Fairhope schools trailed the top-ten average in all but one comparison (7th grade science), typically by double digits in terms of the proficiency gap. Measured as a proficiency ratio, Fairhope schools' results were most often fifteen percent or more below the top-ten average. However, Fairhope's proficiency ratio was at least ninety percent of the top-ten average in seven of the 27 comparisons in Appendix C.

Baldwin County's core expenditures per student are lower than eight of the top ten, primarily because the amount allocated to instruction and instructional support is relatively low, and the amount allocated to facility operations is relatively high. (See Appendix I.) In percentage terms, the Baldwin County System is lower in in the instructional category than nine of the top ten systems. On the other hand, its facility-related operations percentage is higher than all of the top ten systems. The core expenditures per student in the Fairhope schools, while possibly not exactly the same, would be quite similar to core expenditures per student in Baldwin County. In order to mirror the student achievement in the top ten school systems, Fairhope should consider increasing its instruction and instructional support spending.

Fairhope leadership teams openly shared the schools' instructional programs and organizational processes. Discussions with each principal and leadership team included the school's culture, the vision and mission of the school, how personnel collaborate, how personnel use data, instructional programs, grants received from the city, and the delivery of professional development. These discussions and student achievement information guided the development of the following reviews of each Fairhope school. The overall recommendations for Fairhope schools are

outlined in the Recommendations section; however, several recommendations are included in each school's review.

Fairhope Elementary School

The purpose of Fairhope Elementary School is "to challenge EACH student and prepare them for their next level of learning in a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment." Their focus on direction leads them to ask often, "Is it right for children?" The answer to that question helps guide development of plans and strategies. Fairhope Elementary also maintains a strong focus on the community and involves the school and students in community emphases as much as possible.

Math tutors disaggregate data for teachers, and the teachers utilize data on student performance through screenings, Basic Skills Inventory, and implementation of Scantron, STAR, and Compass assessments three times annually. Math, reading, and instructional coaches help teachers create standards-based lessons and integrate science, social studies, and math into literacy instruction. Fairhope Elementary employs tutors to work with students who need help, and students who need acceleration participate in learning labs. They also utilize retired teachers as volunteer tutors for strugglers. The school provides a summer program for incoming kindergarten students.

Fairhope Elementary teachers collaborate in several ways. Two collaborative teams per grade level plan together for student learning. In addition, a principal-appointed leadership team interviews applicants, participates in the selection process for hiring new employees, and provides support and feedback for non-tenured teachers. We recommend an annual or bi-annual rotation of participants to serve on the leadership team. This practice builds leadership and ownership among teachers serving on the team, as well as draws from an expanse of teacher expertise and insight to support students and teachers.

Professional Development at Fairhope Elementary includes teacher-led workshops, Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (*AMSTI*) training, technology training, literacy clinics (*Being a Writer*), *Intentional Planning*, *Bugs Play*, and Depth-of-Knowledge (DOK) workshops.

The third-grade math proficiency gap between Fairhope Elementary and the average of the top-ten schools (shown in Appendix D) is larger for Fairhope's poverty subgroup than it is for the non-poverty subgroup. In reading (Appendix E), the gap is larger for the non-poverty subgroup in third grade than it is for the poverty subgroup. Typically, the gap between students in poverty and those students not in poverty is the opposite. The difference in the two gaps is worth discussing among Fairhope Elementary School's faculty, staff, and administrative team.

A possible cause for the unusual discrepancy in non-poverty students performing at a lower level than students of poverty may reflect the increased level of resources or additional teacher time devoted to closing gaps in students of poverty. We recommend designing lessons that focus on depth of knowledge to accelerate or deepen the learning for all students but especially with non-poverty students performing below their abilities. Challenging students to look at problems from a level of inquiry rather than surface level learning (helping students remember and understand) moves students to higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy for Learning (helping students analyze, evaluate, and create) and develops skills that transfer to other learning situations.

When analyzing student performance data for specific areas of concern, an internal examination of how teachers use instructional time to facilitate students' learning specific skills merits consideration. This would highlight instructional gaps, which may require instructional adjustments in allocations of time, format, or strategies.

Fairhope Intermediate School

The culture of Fairhope Intermediate School is one of continuous learning. The administrative team fosters that culture through their continuity and consistency as a leadership team. Teachers collaborate weekly in their PODS as well as by grade levels. Once a quarter, teachers work in vertical teams to maintain a seamless progression of learning for students.

Teachers collaborate to create common assessments and share with colleagues classroom practices that make a difference in student learning. Looking at the level of rigor of the questions on their assessments is another way teachers collaborate and improve the depth of their instruction and assessments.

Professional learning is important to continue and improve the level of instruction. Teachers receive training in *Writing Across the Curriculum, AMSTI, Go Math, Accelerated Math, Mobile Max,* and data analysis that drives their instruction. School leaders meet with teams of teachers to analyze the CCSS standards and integrate the standards with their instructional practices. They ask themselves, "How do the math standards fit with how we teach math?" As much as possible, the school embeds professional learning for teachers into the school day. Book studies, *Being a Writer*, *Writer's Workshop,* and conversations with literacy experts deepen their skills in guiding students through the writing process.

Intermediate School teachers meet regularly with the administrative team to analyze current data reflecting student progress. Teachers look for trends and outliers in overall classroom performance, but they look primarily at the progress of individual students and create personal plans for improvement for students struggling to master content. Teachers use *Global Scholar* to monitor student progress and make immediate adjustments in instruction to remediate gaps in

learning. The ongoing analysis of data highlights areas of weakness and guides teachers in next steps in instruction.

The Intermediate School benefited from the city's grants through the purchase of a *Comprehension Tool Kit* for teacher use to enhance reading and writing skills. The school also purchased digital practice math skills programs to accelerate and/or remediate students' basic math skills. Grant funds from the city also enabled the school to purchase equipment and staff two science labs for weekly supplemental instruction. We recommend an integration of specific, grade level appropriate CCSS science standards into the science lab teachers' instruction to reinforce the concepts, deepen students' understanding of complex content, and broaden an emphasis on STEM. This content-focused expansion of instruction in the labs increases the value of the investment in the labs and reinforces important learning. Refocusing the instructional role of the science labs to include lab-based instruction focused on the CCSS science standards maximizes students' learning opportunities.

Appendices D, E, and F show the math, reading, and science point gaps for Aspire results. The math gap is higher in grades 4 and 5 and among students in the poverty subgroup. Reading proficiency for the 6th grade poverty subgroup in Fairhope Intermediate School is significantly lower (23.7%) than the average of the top ten schools, while the math proficiency gap for the 6th grade poverty subgroup is 7.65%. A similar dynamic occurs with the 6th grade non-poverty subgroup. The proficiency gap in reading is wider than the gap in math. The math proficiency gap from the average of the top ten schools is 4.59, and the reading gap is 12.24. In science, a significant proficiency gap exists only in the non-poverty subgroup.

J. Larry Newton School

The mission of J. Larry Newton School is to challenge students academically while ensuring they are well prepared for the next level of learning. Key to accomplishing their purpose or mission is the belief that education is a shared responsibility. This belief is evident in Newton's collaborative culture of administrators, faculty, parents, and the Fairhope community.

Newton is a Title I school of 46.6% poverty, which results in additional funding from the federal government. School leaders speak passionately about the students and about the school belief that all students can learn. Newton commits to meeting high academic standards, invests in innovation, and disseminates research to guide their instructional practices.

Building on their belief of collaboration, teachers meet by grade levels daily to share effective strategies and practices that result in increased student learning. Informal sharing of information is ongoing among all staff. Newton implements *Global Scholar Assessment* as well as *Fountas and Pinnell* (leveled readers) to monitor student progress and benchmark their growth. Teachers and parts of the

administrative team participate routinely in monthly data meetings. Detailed notes and agendas record student progress and enable teachers to monitor outcomes of the interventions, remediation, or levelized instruction implemented with each struggling student. Data meetings support teachers by offering opportunities for brainstorming ideas that result in improved learning performance.

Teachers of students failing to master concepts and skills after numerous intervention strategies refer the students to the next level of support, Response to Instruction (RTI). RTI teams (teacher teams) repeat a deliberative process to identify barriers to students' learning, assess student-learning processes and knowledge, and recommend alternatives for student placement or services. Students identified as needing Special Education services remain fully included in the classroom with other students for their instruction. Special education teachers collaborate with the classroom teachers, go into the classrooms, work with the students, and support them in their learning. Teachers also collaborate in teams for Curriculum Mapping (designing pathways and practices for implementing the CCSS standards) and providing a seamless process for teaching and learning the new standards at a deeper level.

Newton teachers also participate in lesson study, a powerful, embedded, peer-to-peer professional learning strategy. For the staff of Newton, the significant value of lesson study goes beyond collaboration to teachers co-planning lessons, observing their peers teaching the actual lessons with a focus on student thinking, and then analyzing and improving the lessons collaboratively for another peer to teach the reconfigured lesson. The real "lesson" of lesson study is not the final product of a superior lesson, but the *process* of the team designing, observing, and analyzing the lesson. The process compels teachers to examine their own practice in depth in the context of student learning. Teachers connect with their students' learning needs as they debrief with peers and reflect on the impact of the lesson. We recommend increasing the number of opportunities for lesson study and deepening the conversations to focus on the work of students in lieu of focusing on teachers' behaviors. Observing students as they interact with the lesson and analyzing the impact of the lesson on their learning enables teachers to reflect on their own practices and their ability to increase student learning.

Newton Elementary represents a highly diverse population. To meet the learning needs of the wide variety of student abilities, interests, cultures, and learning styles, teachers collaborate to design differentiated common lessons and common assessments. The implementation of Reading and Writing Workshops and the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) allows teachers the freedom to focus on specific learning needs. Teachers and school leaders examine the levels of questions they ask students, including rigor in the manner in which they formulate the questions. The Depth of Knowledge training supports teachers in identifying a continuum of instruction and questioning from low-level learning opportunities to high level. Teachers design lessons to meet the individual learning plans of students, which the

teacher and data meeting team members collaboratively create in previous data meetings.

Newton Elementary emphasizes math and science concepts as they pilot the Alabama State Department of Education's Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (*AMSTI*). Teachers supplement AMSTI with *Math Investigations Series* to ensure a conceptual foundation and number sense in addition to basic skills. The Reading Coach supports teachers by modeling lessons and guiding them in decisions for improved performance. Teachers *Look at Student Work (LASW)* to analyze the effectiveness of the work they provide students. This collaborative process supports teachers and their peers in analyzing completed student assignments and assessing the actual quality of the assignments. The outcome of the process is that the examination of the work causes teachers to rethink their instruction prior to the assignment and reevaluate the substance of assignments. The quality of the student work typically improves because the teacher instruction and assignments improve.

A continuation of the process of *Looking at Student Work* can move the student and teacher learning to a deeper level. To achieve a more substantive learning experience, a logical next step for Newton teachers includes eliminating low-level, basic-knowledge assignments, and increasing the expectations for student performance. The use of protocols to guide the *LASW* process protects teachers while urging them to reflect on their purpose, assess their progress, and plan strategies to design more intellectually demanding work for students. If not already in use, Newton should consider adding protocols to the process of *Looking at Student Work*.

Appendices D, E, and F show the math, reading, and science point gaps for Aspire results. Proficiency gaps are higher among the non-poverty subgroup in both reading and math. The 6th grade non-poverty subgroup performed at 50% proficiency in ACT Aspire reading, which indicates an almost 30% gap between Newton Elementary 6th grade reading and the average of the 6th grade reading in the top ten schools. The proficiency gap for the non-poverty 6th grade subgroup's performance in math is not as large as in reading. While the 6th grade math proficiency gap for the poverty subgroup is 6 points, the gap for reading is more than twice that range (16), indicating a continuing need for intervention in reading. In science, a proficiency gap exists only in the non-poverty subgroup; the poverty subgroup performs at a *higher* level than the top ten average.

Fairhope Middle School

Fairhope Middle School's motto, *Experience the Excellence,* communicates their focus on equipping students to do their best in every aspect of their lives and empowering all students to achieve their full potential.

Recognizing the difficulties that accompany students of the preteen age group, Fairhope Middle School emphasizes a culture of kindness among students and staff. Students sign a Bullying Contract and have access to an anonymous tip line to report any incidence of bullying. Leaders and staff communicate a message of safety and support for all students. Parental involvement is another component that contributes to meeting the expectations of excellence. The staff's goal for every middle school student is to leave the school fully prepared for the demands of high school.

Middle school teachers focus on preparing students for high stakes assessments by concentrating on test prep strategies and programs. Some of the strategies include an emphasis on study skills, peer tutoring, COMPASS digital reinforcement package, extended tutoring, and the development of power words. Fairhope Middle School utilized grant money from the city council through AEC to purchase additional test prep materials (*USA Test Prep*).

Teachers participate in grade level and department meetings. They collaborate in monthly RTI (*Response to Instruction)* meetings to analyze student performance and create plans for intervention. The school data team disaggregates student data to share with staff, and the CIP (Continuous Improvement Plan) team analyzes the data to create the school's plans for improvement. Departments use the data to design strategies to make a difference in student learning. An analysis of the effectiveness of their collaboration may help them identify any barriers to maximizing their time together, develop their collaboration skills, and build trust within the teams. Benchmarking another school's data meetings may provide a model to expand the Middle School's use of data to drive instruction, capitalize on observing other formats for data meetings, or deepen teachers' repertoires of strategies and practices that result in increased learning.

In addition, teachers usually benefit more from disaggregating and analyzing their own students' data rather than receiving the data already disaggregated by someone else. The act of actually studying the data themselves deepens teachers' understanding of the students' performance. Working with the data and recognizing student performance by student name informs teachers of key issues perhaps overlooked when receiving the data packet in completed form. We recommend that middle school teachers personally experience the process of analyzing, disaggregating and sharing their data with their team, identifying trends and patterns in the data, and developing plans for intervention to address areas of weaknesses. The collaborative process of each teacher team working with the data and designing instruction in response to students' performances based on previous instruction is one of the most effective forms of professional learning.

Appendices D, E, and F show the math, reading, and science point gaps for Aspire results. The math and reading gaps in Fairhope Middle School are both higher in the 8th grade than in the 7th grade. In 8th grade math, the gap is higher for the non-poverty subgroup, while the 8th grade reading gap is higher for the poverty

subgroup. Fairhope Middle School students perform at about the top ten average in science.

Fairhope High School

Fairhope High School's mission is to "foster integrity and academic excellence in students within a safe, supportive environment created by competent and dedicated professionals." The leadership staff places a priority on their availability to students and staff. Due to a statewide (and local) reduction in school funding, the school recently experienced a loss of staff. Additionally, increases in student enrollment overwhelmed the capacity of the facility to house all classrooms. The school added nine portable classrooms to accommodate the growing population. One teacher does not have a portable classroom and must "float" from classroom to classroom each class period.

High School guidance counselors use inventive strategies to keep students in school, according to the leadership team. The culture of the school is student-driven, and staff provide opportunities for students to develop relationships through clubs. Students hold high expectations for themselves, and the staff "gives them the freedom" to meet those expectations or, in some circumstances, "the freedom to fail." Schools that adopt the belief in a "no fail zone" often redirect the school culture to one of success as the primary focus. The staff may investigate building on their belief of "giving students the freedom" to meet or exceed expectations by providing a safety net when they struggle.

The high school departments or teams meet with the Intermediate and Middle School teams for vertical teaming to ensure a smooth transition and communicate expectations for entering freshmen. Instructionally, the high school implements a "limited form of performance–based learning." Teachers rotate the responsibility of providing tutoring before school, especially in math. The International Baccalaureate (IB) and Pre-IB teachers meet monthly to discuss grades and attendance. The high school benefited from the EAC grant from the city council with purchases of AP textbooks and a STEM cart. We recommend expanding the limited form of performance-based learning to full implementation.

Professional development in the high school is primarily "individually driven." Teachers identify their personal areas of growth and work on those areas independently. The content area departments meet and plan vertically to maintain continuity. The High School emphasis is on developing in-house experts for professional learning in place of accessing outside resources. Advanced Placement teachers and IB teachers attend professional development sessions required by their respective supporting organizations (College Board, IB). Adopting a unified focus and direction for professional learning across the five schools gives meaning to the concept of growing professionally as colleagues. This practice improves teachers' skills, leadership capacity, and develops a climate of continuous learning

for all. We strongly recommend a coherent, research-based, instructional professional development plan to enhance teacher practices in this age of rapidly changing learning and teaching formats.

With reference to college readiness, only in math results is there a large gap between Fairhope High School and the high schools in Alabama's top systems. In Appendix G, it is evident that the primary source of that gap is the performance of non-poverty students.

All twelve of the high schools in the top ten school systems offered six AP courses (Biology, Calculus AB, Chemistry, English Language, English Literature, and US History). Fairhope High School also offered the same six AP courses. More than half of the high schools in top-ten systems offer another ten AP courses. Fairhope offered only three of these ten. These data (see Appendix H) suggest that Fairhope High's AP offerings are concentrated in the courses most commonly found in top-ten systems, but its students do not have access to all AP offerings available to a majority of top-ten schools.

Appendix H shows that Fairhope, at 11 AP courses, offered its students fewer AP choices than all but two of the high schools in top-ten systems. The AP headcount enrollment was lower in relation to student enrollment in grades 10-12 than all but three of the high schools in top-ten systems (Hoover, Cullman, and Arab), as shown by the enrollment ratios in the table. In addition, the passing rate for students taking the final exam on AP courses was lower than all but one of the high schools in top-ten systems (Muscle Shoals).

The Top Ten Alabama School Systems

The top ten Alabama school systems consistently work to increase student learning, and they exhibit certain common characteristics. Leaders, faculty, and staff work together to implement the following research-based *Five Critical Practices* that also correlate with Alabama Plan 2020. A discussion of how the top ten school systems implement the following critical practices is included in this report, as well as specific examples from individual systems. See Appendix A for a more detailed outline of the Five Critical Practices.

Critical Practice 1: Focus on Direction
Critical Practice 2: Build a Powerful Organization
Critical Practice 3: Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action
Critical Practice 4: Give Life to Data
Critical Practice 5: Lead Learning

The top ten Alabama school systems *all* demonstrate *all* of the Five Critical Practices.

Critical Practice 1: Focus on Direction

The top ten school systems are crystal clear about what they do, why they do it, and what results they want to achieve. Everyone – students, faculty, staff, and parents - can describe what the organization is about and where it needs to grow. There is a vibrant focus on direction at every level and in every area. These school systems have an *intentionally* created organizational culture that is supportive of all learners. Everyone works together to ensure high-quality performance, and everyone uses the vision, mission, and strategic plan to make decisions.

The top ten school systems demonstrate a consistent Focus on Direction. There are displays of vision, mission, and belief statements throughout, and *everyone* is able to discuss the vision, mission, and culture of the system. Meeting announcements, agendas, and minutes of faculty and team meetings exhibit this same focus. Their focus also reveals itself in school improvement plans, Web sites and teacher web pages, and other written materials. High performance is clearly a basis for all actions.

The culture of Madison City Schools is one of trust and high expectations for everyone – students, faculty, staff, and leaders. Their vision, "Empowering Students for Global Success," is the foundation for the energetic and innovative system-wide culture. System leaders answer questions collaboratively such as, "What have we forgotten to use that we need to keep?" Their focus on meeting the individual needs of each student reinforces their commitment and direction to utilizing all available resources to "empower students for global success." Interferences or barriers to school schedules, data meetings, or vertical team meetings are strongly discouraged

so that all maintain their focus on the direction and mission of the system.

Homewood City Schools' mission, "to educate and empower every student to reach his or her unique potential" is illustrated by their focus on direction at the system and the school level. Homewood has a culture of "not giving up on kids." They are "doggedly determined" to help every student. Each school has an instructional assistant principal who leads and supports instruction in the school.

The purpose of Mountain Brook Schools "is to provide an effective, challenging, and engaging education for every one of our students." All administrators and teachers ask themselves the question, "Does our purpose statement apply to every student?" The system remains "aware and focused" on applying the purpose universally and works diligently to ensure "all are headed in the same direction." This purpose is evident in everything they do, and each school intentionally focuses on this direction by making mid-course corrections or adjustments when necessary.

Maintaining a focus on the direction of the system during a time of uncertainty and change was difficult for Hoover City Schools. "As painful as it was" at the time, Hoover took bold steps to rectify the situation. Their commitment to maintaining a clear focus on providing students with the necessary skills and tools to succeed in life is noteworthy because of their "willingness to take a hard look at what we're doing well and not well." The system recognized that their third and fourth grade students performed among the lowest one-third of students in their age group in the state. This was a call to action. Hoover struggled through a period of loss of direction several years ago, but with new system leadership, they turned a corner and reaffirmed their student-focused vision and direction.

The motto for Hoover City Schools, *Learning for Life,* provides a clear indication of their vision for "all students as life-long learners." Hoover is very clear about what they want and value for their students and knows they "must be willing to invest in it." They now have a clear vision of who they are and the goals they want to achieve.

The motto for Arab City Schools, *Accepting the Challenge of Excellence,* clearly communicates the focus for the work of the district. The district maintains a history of high academic performance, but within a period of five years significant changes in the community redefined their direction and challenged their practices. Arab experienced a 60% increase in free and reduced lunch participants, which pushed the district to reevaluate their past practices and structures to meet and maintain their challenges for excellence. Arab leadership committed to providing opportunities for teachers to develop the instructional skills necessary to meet the learning needs of children of poverty.

Arab City Schools added five additional professional development days to the calendar to provide time for schools and the district to reflect on their instructional practices, the rigor of their curriculum, and analyze student performance data. After disaggregating student data, schools identify their problems of practice. Schools use

this time to ask themselves, "What is our current practice," What is our desired practice," and "How will we get there?" Each school forms an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) that monitors their efforts toward improved learning. The ILTs create Action Plans that guide the schools in implementing newly learned instructional skills.

The mission of Vestavia Hills Schools is "to ensure that each student learns without limits by pursuing knowledge and igniting curiosity about the world."

High schools in several of the top ten systems reveal how culture can be impacted by the school schedule. In the Trussville City School System, Hewitt-Trussville High School modified their current schedule by offering a "Lunch Plus" schedule, modeled after the "Refuel Hour" at James Clemens High School in the Madison City School System. Mountain Brook High School also offers students an expanded lunchtime. This use of time gives high school students a period of time to recharge during the day, leading to an increase in productivity during afternoon hours, an improvement in their emotional well-being, and an opportunity to participate in school organizations and clubs during the school day. During this school-wide break at James Clemens, students also eat lunch, participate in tutoring and study groups, meet with advisors and mentors, and form student-led interest groups. One daily opportunity is Maker Spaces in the media center, which are creative zones where people can gather to create, invent, and learn. For example, some students build code, fly drones, create crafts, and make connections with each other. All of these desired outcomes promote a positive school culture - the ultimate goal of this new schedule. Generally, several teachers monitor student use of their expanded lunchtime.

Critical Practice 2: Build a Powerful Organization

The top ten school systems do not allow rules or status quo mindsets to interfere with success for any of its students. Every process supports people and facilitates learning for everyone, regardless of age or position. These school systems are strong, effective, energetic, and dynamic, with compelling stories and results. Collaboration and problem solving are pervasive throughout the organization. The organization resolves problems and issues quickly and effectively because the entire organization is agile and flexible and searches for innovative solutions. Superintendents and principals lead faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders in working together to improve processes that increase success and to monitor the effectiveness of processes and procedures.

Each of the top ten school systems works constantly to Build a Powerful Organization. This is evident in the fact that collaboration is a way of life in these systems and in the processes they use to make changes when a current program or process is not working. Mountain Brook City attends to the voices of teachers and students. Including students on committees was a common experience in Mountain

Brook; yet, actually seeking the input of students about core instructional or content issues was not a common practice. When students expressed their desires for a substantive voice in the work of the school, the system responded by seeking their input about critical issues that affected them directly.

Madison City actively cultivates a culture of trust. The culture permeates the actions of the system and supports their beliefs of inclusion and high expectations of all. Because of that trust, the system surveys parents and students regularly and includes the results on their Website for all to see. Students survey one another for input on actions impacting them within the school or the community.

The structure of Madison City schools encourages teacher collaboration and teacher-leader collaboration. Teachers observe one another's classroom instruction and share thoughts and observations about ways to improve. School leaders meet with teachers individually to offer guidance or redirection when necessary and to analyze the student performance data. School and system leaders meet routinely with the superintendent to participate in roundtable discussions of student data and teacher effectiveness for each school. Principals interact with colleagues and offer suggestions or solutions for any difficulties in the schools. The culture of trust is evident in these discussions as the group tackles difficult instructional challenges, specific school issues, or personnel issues.

A part of the process of regaining the focus of Hoover City Schools compelled the system to reassess their organizational structure. The system had functioned in the past as almost two distinct systems, elementary and secondary. Little communication occurred between the two groups of schools and limited vertical alignment transpired to improve student learning. The secondary and elementary schools now communicate, share information, and collaborate. The system invests in the development of current staff (hopefully, future principals) by providing embedded, yearlong professional development for all assistant principals.

Creating procedures for monitoring the implementation of effective instructional practices; identifying processes for ongoing, meaningful, and specific professional development; and building a culture of continuous learning for adults and students established structure for the work of Arab City schools and system. Faculty meetings and principal meetings no longer consist of dispensing housekeeping facts and memoranda. Instead, those meetings provide protected time for professional development for school staffs and district administrators.

The individual schools in the Arab City System worked in isolation for many years. Disconnected professional development across the schools resulted in no common language among teachers, administrators, or students. The district recognized the need for continuity in focus and coherence in practice to grow as instructional leaders and improve as learners. The high school instituted Luncheon Learners to allow teachers and instructional coaches a time to discuss issues such as

instructional strategies, assessments, collaborative lessons, and support for individual struggling students.

To support the renewed emphasis on building teacher skills that accept the challenge of excellence, the district provides resources to employ (at local expense) three full-time instructional coaches for teachers in grades six through twelve. Elementary grades' ARI coaches provide support for the K-2 and 3-5 schools. The coaches work with teachers in vertical planning teams, which "makes a huge difference" in achieving consistency across grade levels and expanding ownership of skills and concepts.

Critical Practice 3: Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action

The top ten school systems have identified beliefs and values that establish the focus and direction of the work. School and system environments *continuously* focus on student learning. Leaders create a student-centered vision and culture, provide instructional leadership, and lead the development of guidelines and procedures for learning.

Ensuring that a school or system's vision and actions are student-focused prioritizes efforts so that faculty, staff, and students have the necessary resources for success, and the learning opportunities for students improve continuously. The top ten school systems include stakeholders in crafting the vision and ensuring that processes support student learning.

Leaders in the top ten school systems consistently demonstrate the skills necessary to guide internal and external stakeholders to reach desired outcomes. Leaders anticipate interruptions or detours in the change process, monitor progress, and communicate and redirect discrepancies between desired outcomes and reality. They coordinate experiences that enhance learning, establish a culture of mutual respect, lead conversations about learning experiences, and ensure improvement in teaching practices.

People work together in the top ten school systems to identify parameters for accomplishing goals and affecting change. Alignment of the organization's focus or direction with daily work practices highlights inconsistencies and redirects the actions of the organization. Top ten leaders actively support faculty and staff in creating processes and practices that guide the work of designing profound learning experiences and environments for students. They also address the variety of student needs, identify skills and knowledge for learning, support staff collaboration, and ensure the development of experiential, hands-on learning opportunities.

The top ten school systems' efforts are clearly demonstrated through their use of curriculum mapping, collaborative meeting notes and agendas tied to curriculum

alignment activities, aligned assessments, disaggregated state and local assessment data, and communications with students and families regarding expectations and available support for learning. Everyone in these school systems can talk about how the vision and culture focus on student learning and student needs and how they deliver effective instruction.

In Mountain Brook Schools, teachers work to "customize" the learning for students. During Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers study the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) and dissect them to understand fully the new standards and to design "rigorous" lessons specifically for their student population. Keeping their students in mind, teachers create assessment pieces that reflect deep learning rather than shallow recitation of facts.

Mountain Brook also develops the "executive function skills" of students through goal setting. As teachers guide students in developing the skill to set goals for their learning, students learn to create a plan, prioritize next steps, create a workable schedule, insert checkpoints for progress, secure support, accomplish the goals, and analyze the process. The process of setting goals encourages student ownership of their learning while building life skills.

Hoover's emphasis on continuous learning for all students led them to gather information from the experts – the students. The students eagerly told the teachers, "Let me show you how I want to learn." The voice of students supported a new culture of learning where a key concept for the system was "intentionality." Teachers and leaders were deliberate in their actions to improve the learning experience for students, and students were intentional in asking for the help they needed.

In Madison City Schools, the instructional focus permeates all discussions. The system provides, through local funds and grants, additional instructional personnel who support teachers and leaders. Expectations for all students' academic performance never waiver or dissipate. The belief and expectation of enhanced learning for all is evident in conversations with system leaders and staff. Conversations rarely stray from "how can we improve what we do?" Leaders commit to providing the professional development teachers need to answer that question.

Homewood teachers at all levels have a significant amount of embedded and structured time during the school day to collaborate with their colleagues. Elementary teachers, in addition to 25 minutes per day of personal planning time, have 50 minutes four times each week of collaborative time to work with colleagues. Middle school teachers have 45 minutes per day of personal planning time and 45 minutes per day of common planning time with colleagues. In the high school, teachers have one period per day free for personal planning time and another period every day for collaborative planning. The middle school collaborative schedule provides an example of how teachers use their collaborative planning time.

In any given week, teachers use one of the collaborative planning times for interdisciplinary team meetings where they discuss the performance and success of their shared students and what kind of help they need. Teachers devote another day to content meetings, including curriculum mapping and lesson planning for a particular content area. Teachers, on the third day, work with the instructional leader and, on the fourth day, with the technology specialist. They allocate the collaborative period on the fifth day to parent conferences and IEP meetings.

Homewood also hires tutors – generally retired teachers – to tutor students during the school day. Tutors use research-based programs to help students who need intervention to ensure success.

Homewood teachers worked together to define what their students should know and be able to do at each grade level. These "learning targets" are specific to Homewood, ensure consistent expectations, and add rigor and clarity to the Alabama course of study. In addition, the learning targets ensure that teachers throughout the system know exactly what their students need to know as they move to the next grade level as well as what they can expect incoming students to know.

The learning targets include student friendly "I can" statements. For example, the first two statements in the sixth grade writing learning target are:

1. I can write arguments that support claims using clear reasoning and meaningful evidence.
2. I can write informative/explanatory texts to examine and express complex ideas and information.

Trussville City Schools also provides teachers with considerable collaborative time during the school day to work together. In the earliest grades, students dismiss at 2:00 P.M. each Monday, and teachers collaborate until 3:45 P.M. Each Thursday at the high school, students arrive at 9:15 A.M., and teachers collaborate between 7:30 and 9:15 A.M. In the intermediate grades, students attend club meetings, led by specials teachers, volunteers, and aides, several times a month; during those times, teachers have collaborative time. Trussville ensures structure in their collaborative times and employs protocols to ensure positive results.

Arab City Schools maintain a strong partnership with AMSTI. Recognizing the number of students demonstrating deficiencies in mathematics, schools identified structures to meet the specific skill needs of students. Their past collaboration with AMSTI led the district to participate in Ogap Math (Ongoing Assessment Project), a formative assessment-based math framework from AMSTI. The project allows teachers to closely monitor individual student performance and identify skills needing remediation. Teachers receive four days of training in the summer demonstrating how to intervene and move students to the next level. Another area of concentration is the addition of Advanced Placement (AP) courses that equip students with the skills for college and/or careers. The district's participation in AP College Ready provides professional development for AP teachers and for Pre-AP

teachers through College Board AP classes and College Board's Laying the Foundation training.

Vestavia Hills teachers participate in a Leading By Learning initiative. Leading By Learning is similar to doctors' hospital rounds and provides teachers with opportunities to observe their colleagues teaching and examine the ways different teaching strategies could be used in a variety of subject areas.

Critical Practice 4: Give Life to Data

The top ten school systems consistently analyze key data and use data and current research to improve student learning. Schools communicate key data to stakeholders, using a variety of methods to ensure understanding. These data are not static, tedious facts to endured, but are dynamic, interesting, and *living information* that create knowledge and benefit everyone.

The effective data analysis in these top ten school systems uncovers connections, trends, and patterns useful in making successful decisions. Moreover, relevant data, collected and analyzed in an organized manner, establish a sense of confidence in the results.

In the top ten school systems, data that focus on results guide decisions, and the decision-making process is highly data driven. In these school systems, leaders make sure the appropriate data are available, maintain a schedule that provides time for collaborative data analysis, review data analyses and use on a regular basis, and ensure the use of effective data analysis tools. Data analysis in the top ten school systems is not the job of just one person. Leadership teams, faculty, and staff work together to select, gather, analyze, manage, and improve school data and knowledge resources.

The ongoing study of data encouraged Mountain Brook City Schools to examine closely teacher classroom practices in the areas of reading and writing. Initiated by classroom teachers with concerns for student performance, the system collaboratively revised their instructional model for English Language Arts to the workshop model. Many teachers' driving questions during the revision process was, "What will it look like?" Teachers attended training with Lucy Calkins and with Vanderbilt University Experimental School and implemented their new knowledge and skills as teacher trainers of their peers. In response to these renewed literacy efforts, the system provided a literacy coach for each school to support the teachers and students in their English Language Arts work.

The top ten school systems *Give Life to Data* in many ways. Most of schools in the top ten school systems hold regular data meetings that include faculty and staff. In addition, some involve students and parents.

Arab City Schools value the information gained from looking at student data as a part of their improvement process. The district format for monitoring student performance data that result in increased learning is the Data-Wise Improvement Process. The framework includes eight steps that involve all schools, teachers, and the district in the rigorous process. In the past, Arab did not develop a Continuous Plan for Improvement; however, implementation of the Data-Wise Improvement Process enables the district to identify areas of in need of improvement and create an Action Plan.

The Madison City School System holds regular data meetings with all administrators and supervisors, and extensive disaggregated data from all schools are available for everyone to review and discuss. Consequently, all leaders learn from each other about what works and what does not work. Teams discuss every level of student learning, including honors classes. Longitudinal growth analyses show that student achievement grew at more than the national average in reading and math in grades 3-8. This transparent system-wide data review guides and supports continuous improvement of student learning. A data dashboard is available for parents and stakeholders on the system's Website at http://www.madisoncity.k12.al.us/?DivisionID=8747&ToggleSideNav=.

An analysis of data began the journey for Hoover to reconfigure their organizational structure and teacher classroom practices. Aside from recognizing the poor performance of one-third of their third and fourth grade students, Hoover studied the transiency of the system's enrollment and the impact of students' lack of stability on their learning. Leaders realized the need to design strategies that supported the teachers as they worked with all students, especially those new to the system. Teachers implemented formative assessments to guide their instruction and build students' skills. Ultimately, disaggregating their students' data provided the system the road map to plan the teachers' professional development necessary to affect increases in student learning.

Leaders and teachers in the Vestavia Hills School System compare assessment data over time and across grades and schools to determine strengths and needs at the system, program, grade, class, teacher, subgroup, and student level. Data are compiled and reviewed regularly to identify and prioritize instructional and professional development needs.

Critical Practice 5: Lead Learning

High-performing schools and systems are *always* learning organizations. Leaders in the top ten school systems continuously learn and create an environment that encourages the same in others. Teachers participate in ongoing daily learning experiences, challenge the status quo, and support innovation.

Today's educators must adapt to meet demands that are continuously changing and expanding, leading a shift from teaching to learning. These adaptive changes often have no obvious answers, requiring leaders and teachers to expand continuously their own abilities through systematic processes for sharing knowledge. Everyone in the top ten school systems is encouraged to collaborate, reflect, and share knowledge.

Leaders in the top ten school systems know that change often happens quickly, so they place high value on creating capacity, on the ability to anticipate, engage in, and benefit from all kinds of situations. Leaders in these school systems are expert at challenging the status quo, using knowledge to innovate, asking the right questions and listening to the answers, and creating a sense of urgency about change. At the same time, they understand that change often causes a sense of loss when people have to give up the familiar, the way they learned to function, or the security of knowing exactly what to do next. Therefore, the creation of a culture of caring, communication, and collaboration is critical.

Everyone in the top ten school systems works together to solve many of the obstacles to learning, help generate and celebrate new ideas, create a culture of innovation, and invest resources in innovation. In Madison City, faculty and students are encouraged to innovate. This is described in a video, "Teaching Outside the Box" (http://www.madisoncity.k12.al.us/?DivisionID=7842&ToggleSideNav=). Madison City Schools invest heavily in professional development, which is continuous and job-embedded throughout the school year. The system employs instructional coaches housed on every campus. The instructional coaches have the responsibility for professional development and coaching in the schools. Learning walks and instructional rounds ensure the implementation of newly learned practices in the classroom.

Homewood City Schools invests in substantial professional development for teachers. A major focus of the system is creating and maintaining differentiated classrooms, scaffolding instruction, and determining "what mastery looks like."

Mountain Brook City Schools hold Summer Professional Learning Programs that provide teachers with opportunities to participate in professional development unique to their subject area or grade level needs. Teachers write proposals to work together to plan effective, challenging, and engaging lessons or common assessments. They may request time, support, and a stipend to meet with colleagues in order to impact student learning.

The schools in Mountain Brook also hold an annual Institute for Innovation, whose purpose is "to establish a pathway for a culture of innovators" and to focus on "educational transformation." Mountain Brook teachers develop a proposal and the Mountain Brook Education Foundation provides funding for selected innovative ideas. Several examples of selected projects are a 3-D design and technology maker

room, a virtual learning space, researching a model of enrichment for all, and the flipped kit for learning.

Mountain Brook City Schools examined their focus and the manner in which they "did school" to ensure they were, in fact, a learning organization and not a bureaucracy. System leadership looked deeply at their purpose, practices, and direction of their work and asked themselves, "What does a learning organization look like that is different from a bureaucracy?" As principals listened to teachers and provided guidance, leaders committed to providing guidance and support for principals. To strengthen their skills in leading the learning and supporting the schools, all administrators received training in coaching skills.

Hoover's leaders and teachers recognized a growing need for knowledge building for staff. Over time, Hoover's professional learning was no longer as relevant as in the past, and leaders understood that without teacher professional development students suffer. Assessment data identified math, assessments, and reading and writing as areas in need of support.

The system looked at gaps in content areas, which quickly highlighted poor math skills in the lower grades. Hoover had used a constructivist math program (*Investigations*) for several years, which involved very little direct teaching of math skills. Students grasped the broad concepts in math. Mastery of the broad concepts was vital, but without basic skills to compute and solve arithmetical problems, the concepts faltered. Teachers adopted a blend of the two approaches to ensure mastery (*Investigations* and OGAP) and received training to support the changes in the classrooms.

A similar situation arose in Hoover students' reading and writing performances. Some students learned to write persuasive or narrative papers, but teachers recognized that their deficits in the basic mechanics of writing interfered with the production of a quality product. Again, leaders provided ongoing opportunities for teachers to observe modeled instruction in blending the two skills (conceptual and mechanical).

High-quality professional development is a priority in Vestavia Hills City Schools, where it is provided both during the school year in job-embedded learning and during the summer. Vestavia Hills City Schools held vXchange15, a new kind of professional development day for teachers. One hundred sessions, planned and executed by teachers for teachers and hosted at four locations in the system, focused on engagement, collaboration, and innovation. Participants attended live webinars, teacher-led roundtables, Google Classroom Boot Camps, and other sessions of interest to participants.

As Arab City Schools redefines their structures for improving practices to reflect their changing population, the district focuses on purposeful implementation of professional development designed to improve instruction. Embedded professional

development provides teachers opportunities for real-time application of best practices. Principals and assistant principals participate in monthly professional development with the goal of developing their leadership skills and learning to build or maintain a culture of collaboration in their schools.

School Funds Provided By the City of Fairhope: Cost Benefit Comparison (CBC)

Comparing the benefits of programs with their associated costs can help measure and communicate the value of results achieved by education programs for students. The comparison attempts to answer the questions: What do we receive for funds allocated to the schools? Are the returns greater than the costs? Are the costs justified by the returns? How can we make knowledgeable decisions about the continuing use of resources?

Resources are generally scarce and can be used in different ways. Therefore, it is critical to ensure the efficient and effective use of such resources. A cost-benefit comparison (CBC) is a useful tool to help inform policymakers and stakeholders about the benefits of various policies and programs.

At the most basic level, a CBC determines if benefits exceed costs. Below are the 2015 allocations the city of Fairhope provided to the Fairhope schools, goals identified by the schools, programs funded, and descriptions of the expenditures. Benefits will be established when goals are determined to be met or unmet.

School	Goal	Program	Amount	Description/Benefits
Fairhope Elementary	Improvement in oral reading fluency and math proficiency as well as ACT Aspire scores	Accelerated Reading program	$8,690.00	Positive effect on general reading ability. Research indicates no improvement in fluency, mixed results in comprehension.
		Moby Max Web Based Math/Reading	$600.00	Online identification of gaps in learning and assignment of skills for remediation.
		Big Universe Digital Library	$3,000.00	eLibrary that motivates/engages students in reading and builds vocabulary. Good motivational tool to expand access to literature.
		Flocabulary Web Based Math/Reading	$1,200.00	Educational Hip-Hop songs/videos geared to increase student engagement that results in increased mastery of skills. Focused on skill development.
		Triumph Learning Math/Reading and Aspire Readiness	$6,775.00	Supplemental Web-based CCSS lessons, practice, and assessments in preparation for Aspire.
		K-1 Math and Reading Summer Camp	$2,000.00	Personnel for remediation/acceleration in basic concepts. Helps struggling students and/or highly motivated students.
		In-School Tutoring Math/Reading	$13,500.00	Personnel for tutoring students and closing achievement gaps. Ongoing support for struggling students.
Fairhope Intermediate	2% improvement in ACT Aspire	Accelerated Reading; Star Reading/Math, Math Facts in a Flash	$12,000.00	Supplemental reading and math software and assessments. STAR tracks progress and provides data.
		Moby Max Web Based Math/Reading	$599.00	Online identification of learning gaps. Assigns practice to remediate.
		Literary Book Studies (4th grade)	$12,000.00	Grade-level book sets to build literacy skills through teacher guidance.
		Two 19-hour science lab instructors	$24,000.00	Good concept; not concentrated on instruction in grade-level science standards.
		IXL: Math intervention	$3,600.00	Online math diagnostic and practice to close skill gaps.
		Scholastic: Class Library sets (5th and 6th grades)	$5,536.00	Grade level appropriate books to build reading skills with teacher guidance.

J. Larry Newton	(1) 5% growth in ACT Aspire reading scores 2015 (2) At least a year's worth of growth as measured by Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment	Guided Reading collection	$30,000.00	Leveled sets of books for teacher-guided lessons that improve literacy skills.
		Classroom libraries	$45,000.00	Sets of ability-level appropriate books to support and build reading skills essential to deepening skills and comprehension.
		Benchmark Assessment Systems	$3,750.00	Program to provide progress data and demonstrate change or growth.
		Reader's Notebooks	$4,725.00	Notebooks to help students become better readers through writing, improve students' reading comprehension, and encourage students to write their thoughts about what they read.
Fairhope Middle	2% improvement in ACT Aspire	USA test prep in creative writing; certified teacher	$8,775.00	Online test prep to prepare for ACT Aspire test-taking skills or tips.
		USA test prep; reading and math tutor	$10,160.00	Online test prep for ACT Aspire test-taking skills or tips.
Fairhope High	Increase percentage of AP test scores and IB diplomas awarded	Training for Pre-AP and AP teachers	$22,100.00	College Board provided professional development in instructional best practices for success in AP and Pre-AP.
		Books and supplies for AP and IB programs	$126,842.00	Textbooks for upper level courses in AP and IB.

School goals for Fairhope City Council allocations are admirable and generally achievable. There may be additions to the goals that would provide additional support for determining the effectiveness of the programs or materials. In the future, the schools might consider developing SMART goals.

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-based. We can think of them as a text road map showing exactly what you want to achieve and how you plan to get there. SMART goal setting focuses efforts, builds consensus, ensures attainability, and helps measure progress.

SMART goals are not difficult to write. Answering the questions in the following five steps will result in a clear SMART goal.

Step	**Question**

1	What is the specific goal you want to accomplish? A specific goal includes who is involved, what needs to be accomplished, any requirements, the benefits of the goal, and how it will be achieved.
2	How will you measure your progress? How will you know when your goal is accomplished?
3	Time for a reality check. Is your goal attainable?
4	Is your goal realistic and relevant?
5	Is your goal time-based? Do you know when it should be accomplished?

When setting goals and making purchases, a factor to consider is the abundance of research on improving student achievement. Over two hundred studies have shown that a skilled and knowledgeable teacher is the major reason for increased student achievement.[1] Each additional dollar expended to advance teacher quality produces greater student achievement increases than using school resources for any other strategy or material.[2] The most important factor in high student performance is the teacher. Research shows that students do not learn as much from an ineffective teacher; in fact, their academic performance actually declines.[3] In addition, for students with a highly effective teacher after several consecutive ineffective teachers, learning improved; yet students were not able to make up for the lost learning.[4]

With reference to technology purchases, a study found that technology – *if implemented properly* - could produce significant gains in student achievement and boost engagement, particularly among students most at risk.[5] If the goal is higher student performance, money spent on high-quality professional development, investing in the effectiveness of teachers, will provide a significant cost-benefit. And, finally, leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning.[6] Consequently, professional development for leaders is also crucial.

Recommendations

The top ten Alabama school systems consistently work to increase student learning, and they exhibit certain common characteristics The top ten Alabama school systems *all* demonstrate *all* of the following Five Critical Practices.

Critical Practice 1: Focus on Direction
Critical Practice 2: Build a Powerful Organization
Critical Practice 3: Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action
Critical Practice 4: Give Life to Data
Critical Practice 5: Lead Learning

We recommend that Fairhope schools review their programs and school organization (see the School or System Inventory in Appendix J) with reference to all of the Five Critical Practices, but more specifically the following specific recommendations target increasing student achievement in order to move the Fairhope schools into the top ten high-performing school systems.

Professional Development

As discussed previously, quality professional development for teachers is a critical component of school or system efforts to produce high student performance. Rigorous, high-quality professional development results in improved teaching and learning and higher student performance.

The goal of high quality professional development is to increase student learning and achievement. The secret to achieving that goal is through professional development for teachers, principals, and others working directly in the learning process. As teachers' skills in instructional practices and knowledge of curriculum grow and improve, students' abilities to learn rigorous content at higher levels grow, too. The creation of a long-term professional development plan that supports teacher growth also fosters continuity among schools, which results in improvement in student learning.

Without a plan for professional learning, teachers struggle to maintain the skills to meet the increasing demands for all students' academic needs in the classroom. Each school has its own specific needs based on the age and experiences of students or the experience level of teachers, which dictate differentiation of professional learning opportunities. However, in additional to site-based professional learning, a seamless, common thread of professional learning in best practices for K-12 instruction encourages a culture of collaboration and collegiality among staff and expands the learning of students.

Most systems spend, on average, 1% to 3% percent of their budgets on professional development.[7] The federal government, however, requires that 10% of Title I funds be allocated to professional development, and Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) recommends the same percentage.[8] The top ten systems provide significant professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders.

We recommend that Fairhope teachers and leaders receive the kind and amount of effective professional development that assists educators in developing the knowledge and skills they need to support student learning. Ultimately, effective professional development positively affects teachers' instruction and administrators' leadership.

Professional development for educators does not merely include attending conferences. In fact, some of the best professional development involves small teams of teachers meeting several times a week to engage in team-directed professional learning. As teams learn together, more experienced educators share with those who are less experienced, increasing learning for all. An added benefit of team learning and the discussions that invariably touch on student learning is that all educators on the team begin to share concern for the success of all students. Effective professional development may also involve one teacher observing another teacher. Neither of these strategies requires bringing in expensive speakers or sending groups of educators to costly conferences, although speakers and conferences also offer positive professional development opportunities. It is necessary, however, to carefully plan for effective team learning, and the time spent in professional learning generally requires the use of resources to provide time outside of the classroom.

In summary, we believe that for Fairhope schools to move into the top ten, a crucial, much-needed requirement for faculty, staff, and leaders is ongoing, well-planned, targeted to needs, and effective professional development.

Teacher Collaborative Time

Some of the best professional development consists of teachers working and learning together. *Learning Forward* suggests that learning and collaboration with colleagues occupy at least 25% of an educator's work time.[9] Current research shows that teacher collaboration achieves results. The top ten school systems nurture a culture of sharing what works and what does not work.

Research by Harvard Business School's Amy Edmonson finds that organizations often prosper or decline based on employees' ability to work in teams.[10] Teachers of all abilities also gain high value from working together to solve instructional problems.[11] In fact, in schools, stronger student performance links with higher levels of teacher collaboration.[12] For example, a recent study showed that teachers who worked often with colleagues on instructional issues were more likely to

produce student achievement gains, regardless of their education, experience, or previous student achievement levels.[13] In addition, another recent study found that the most powerful predictor of student achievement over time was peer learning and shared expertise among small groups of teachers. [14]

According to a Homewood administrator, one of the top reasons their students achieve at such a high level is because of the significant amount of collaborative time Homewood provides for teachers. It can be, however, an expensive strategy used to create and support increased student achievement.

The top ten school systems used various methods to free teachers' time for collaboration. Some of these are reducing time teachers spend on routine duties; paying substitutes during the academic year and/or paying teachers' stipends for summer work; scheduling late arrival or early release days for students; changing the format of faculty meetings to collaborative work time; and scheduling common planning time throughout the week. Additional personnel are generally a necessity, especially in middle and high schools and large elementary schools.

We recommend that Fairhope schools provide teachers at all levels with substantial, structured, and regular time for collaboration. It might be helpful for administrators to visit several of the top ten school systems that provide considerable collaborative time for teachers.

Lesson Study

Lesson study is a form of long-term professional development in which teams of teachers collaboratively plan, research, and study their lesson and instruction as a way to determine how students learn best. Lesson study is a process that deepens the interaction of a school's professional learning community by developing the habits of self-reflection and critical thinking through very personal collaboration with their colleagues and structured observation of their students.

To conduct lesson study, a group of teachers researches and writes a lesson plan on a particular theme. The teachers also write expectations for the lesson; how students will respond to it, whether it will help them understand a certain concept better, and how it will teach them to grasp that concept.

Once teachers finish designing the lesson, one teacher from the group volunteers to teach it to his or her class and the other teachers receive release time to observe the implementation of the lesson. As teachers observe the lesson, they concentrate on the actions of the students. The goal is not to critique the teacher's implementation of the lesson but to observe the students and note if/how the lesson met expectations and if students learned the concepts. After that, teachers reconvene, review their notes from the observations, and make revisions as needed. Then, another teacher volunteers to teach the same lesson with the revisions. The group

completes the same process of observation, note taking, reconvening, making revisions, and assessing their personal learning about teacher practice.

Teachers research, create, implement, and assess the lesson they created, which allows them to practice and learn techniques to enhance the learning for students. Lesson study is a powerful professional learning process that benefits teachers and students at all grade levels and content areas. Teachers in Fairhope schools who do not already utilize the lesson study model will experience significant growth in their practices after participating in training in the lesson study model.

Looking at Student Work (LASW)

Collaborating with colleagues to improve the quality of work provided for students results in teacher growth and increased student learning. LASW provides teachers opportunities for sustained conversations about teaching and learning without derailing the conversation with peripheral issues. Looking at Student Work is embedded professional development that consistently improves teacher practices.

Any time teachers share in conversations about teaching and learning, they participate in reflective thinking about their beliefs and practices. Trusting colleagues to provide thoughtful, insightful feedback about student work reinforces a respectful culture of continuous learning for all. Teachers gain an understanding of what students are thinking and how their thinking is developing over time.

To begin LASW, teachers agree upon guidelines for conversations, which provide structure to the experience and allow conversations to occur. LASW often involves difficult conversations, and the guidelines form the basis of a protocol for conversations. Protocols are tools that promote the skills and support the culture necessary for collaborative work. They foster trust and create a safe environment for teachers that allows them to ask challenging questions and probe each other's answers. Protocols also provide an agenda for the session, specifying the times allotted for each part of the process, for example:

- The teacher/presenter presents a student work sample and provides an explanation of the work (including standards) (15 minutes).
- Participants ask focusing questions (5 minutes each).
- Participants ask clarifying questions (5 minutes each).
- Participants ask "probing" questions (5 minutes each).
- Participants provide feedback on the work (15 minutes).
- The teacher/presenter reflects on the feedback (15 minutes).

The presenter (the teacher sharing a student work sample) and facilitator (the principal or another teacher) share the responsibility for providing copies of all documents for every team member during the process. The copies include:

- The protocol
- Student work

- Rubrics
- Specific learning goals

The facilitator establishes norms prior to the meeting or leads the team in establishing team norms to guide the work of the team and remove the fear of sharing examples of students' work. The facilitator shares the team norms at the beginning of each session and reiterates, "This is how we do our work."

Examples of team norms include:

- Start on time and end on time
- Stay focused on the task
- Demonstrate respect for your peers
- Focus on understanding when different opinions surface
- Provide balanced feedback that acknowledges strengths as well as gaps in the work

Looking at Student Work is a trusted process for professional learning and a positive tool for monitoring student learning over time. We recommend that any of the schools not involved in LASW benchmark other schools already involved in the process and include the practice in their routine professional development.

Data Meetings

Data meetings, held at classroom, school, and/or system levels, require some teacher collaborative time. Effective data meetings also require a leader who is experienced and comfortable with disaggregating and integrating data and with leading others to look more deeply into what the data mean, continually asking, "What are the data telling us?"

Effective data meetings actively engage teacher teams in planning interventions that address student-learning needs and identifying strategies for continuous improvement. Data Meetings analyze multiple data sources, including state assessment results, formative assessment results, and teacher-designed assignments.

Data meetings and test results are not tools to identify students who need improved test taking skills to gain a few more points to reach proficiency, but rather to ensure that all students have the necessary knowledge and skills to attain success in college and careers.

There are a number of ways to plan and implement school data meetings. Fairhope schools are already working in this area. The strength of these data meetings is critical. Schools already demonstrating proficiency in leading these meetings could support other schools in the system in refining their processes.

We recommend that leaders of each Fairhope school implement regular and rigorous study of student learning and individual student challenges in data meetings. Schools could also share with each other their strategies for conducting data meetings so that each school learns from the others.

We further recommend that administrators from all Fairhope schools meet together with a leader to review and discuss the progress of their schools' performance. Disaggregated data from all schools should remain available for everyone to review and discuss. Discussions about what works and what does not work help every school's continuous improvement efforts. This is a step that is often difficult to begin, but once started, brings about significant increases in student performance. The use of a protocol to guide the conversations lessens the fear of sharing concerns. We believe this process is necessary for the Fairhope schools to move into the top ten.

Professional Learning Communities

The concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) is apparent throughout the Teacher Collaborative Time and Data Meeting sections. It is important to note that all the current research confirms that professional learning communities have a positive effect on both student and adult learning. In a study of high-performing school systems, researchers found that, in successful systems, schools operated as PLCs.[15]

In schools that function as PLCs, teachers collectively take responsibility for student learning and work together to increase student achievement.[16] In PLCs, teachers also share teaching practices and student results, talk more with each other about improving instruction, and embrace continuous improvement.[17]

When teachers have time for collaboration and the school functions as a PLC, teachers generally discuss questions such as these.

- What are our fundamental beliefs related to how children learn?
- What makes up the skill we identify as "effective teaching?"
- How will we create classrooms that ensure student engagement?
- What is the role of school leaders in creating an environment that encourages innovation?
- What is the role of the teacher in ensuring students learn at their highest levels?
- What is the role of the student in his/her own learning?
- How will we know that students achieved mastery of a concept?

The answers to these questions, determined through honest and sometimes difficult conversations, lead to conclusions regarding curriculum, instruction, performance expectations, and creating quality opportunities for teaching and learning. These form the cohesive structure for the work of the schools.

We recommend that all Fairhope schools implement professional learning communities if they have not already or develop further those that are already in place.

Personnel

We recommend additional personnel for Fairhope schools to move into the top ten school systems, as follows:

- A position such as assistant superintendent or director to oversee curriculum, instruction, and data for the Fairhope schools
- Additional substitutes to provide collaborative time for teachers

The foundation program allocates the following:
One teacher unit for every 14.25 students in grades K-3
One teacher unit for every 21.85 students in grades 4-6

These are not optimum class sizes, however, they are the funding formulas. Fairhope class sizes appear uneven across schools, possibly based on the funding formula. We recommend that Fairhope study all class sizes and the potential need for additional personnel.

Staffing

Disparity among the class sizes in schools serving elementary-aged students may indicate a need to reevaluate staffing in those schools. (See Appendix J for the personnel calculations and staffing model.)

Instructional Methods

Content Integration

In their book *Meeting Standards Through Integrated Curriculum*[18], Drake and Burns share their concern for deepening student learning. The authors address creating curriculum and instruction that remove boundaries and synchronize standards across disciplines.

When teachers integrate the disciplines within a particular subject area, they are using an intradisciplinary approach (the integration occurs within the content area and not across content areas). Integrating reading, writing, and oral communication in language arts is a common example. Teachers at all levels often integrate history, geography, economics, and government as an integrated social studies program. Integrated science incorporates the disciplines in biology, chemistry, physics, and earth/space science and demonstrates the interconnectedness of concepts. The University of Alabama's Center for Communication and Educational Technology

offers this type of program for middle schools. Through integration, teachers lead students in understanding connections between the different levels of information within a particular content area or discipline. These experiences support students' understanding of the interconnectedness of knowledge and learning in the real world.

Integrating disciplines requires teachers to plan and design experiences for students that cause them to think and "see" connections in a different way. The process requires time and teacher collaboration. Common planning times or other professional development times allow teachers protected time to discuss their interdisciplinary units of study. Teachers examine their courses of study/standards and identify areas that overlap among their content areas. This enables teachers to scan the standards of their individual content areas, cluster the standards that fit in an interdisciplinary unit, and create maps that highlight a guide to the implementation of the integrated unit. A clear, step-by-step plan of objectives, timeline, strategies, assessment tools, goals for mastery of content, and a delegation of responsibilities for each teacher prepare the unit for instruction.
Teachers know that learning information presented in a variety of formats or contexts supports learning at a deep, substantive level. As teachers work within and across grade levels or content teams, they develop a variety of strategies to include common, rigorous concepts or skills that cause students to think, see the connections across disciplines, and understand.

Marzano's High-Yield Instructional Strategies

Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) outlined in *Classroom Instruction That Works*[19] nine high-yield instructional strategies. The nine strategies, identified though a meta-study of over 100 research studies, are most likely to improve student achievement across all content areas and across all grade levels. These strategies, in order from the one that makes the most difference in student achievement (identifying similarities and differences) to the one that makes the least (cues, questions, and advance organizers), are:

1. Identifying similarities and differences
2. Summarizing and note taking
3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
4. Homework and practice
5. Nonlinguistic representations
6. Cooperative learning
7. Setting objectives and providing feedback
8. Generating and testing hypotheses
9. Cues, questions, and advance organizers

We recommend ongoing quality professional development about these high-yield instructional strategies for leaders and teachers in Fairhope schools who are not using these concepts. There are many high-quality professional development

opportunities that provide the research behind the strategies, teaching tips, and many other resources (including for example, charts, diagrams, graphic organizers, and lesson plans) for teachers about each strategy.

Learning about all nine of the strategies is critical. Focusing on any one strategy exclusively is generally a mistake. For this reason, the quality of the professional development is crucial, and it should be ongoing so that teachers have the time to practice the strategies and reflect on their effectiveness.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning, sometimes called project-based learning, is a kind of student-centered instruction that involves students selecting, planning, researching, and creating a product, presentation or performance. The product is one that solves an authentic, real-world problem or challenge. Teachers, rather than being lecturers, generally serve as facilitators, providing guidance as well as tactical and deliberate instruction during the process.

Considerable research shows that PBL effectively increases student achievement, usually at a higher level than teacher-provided lectures. For example, PBL enables students to retain content longer, with a deeper understanding, and perform better on content knowledge assessments.[20] In several content areas - math, economics, language, and science - PBL has demonstrated a higher level of effectiveness than traditional teaching methods,[21] and PBL students perform as well or better on high-stakes tests.[22]

PBL is effective for any subject area and any grade level. We recommend that Fairhope leaders and teachers investigate PBL to determine areas in which it might serve students. Teachers who are interested should be provided with high quality professional development and if possible visit schools that are experienced in using PBL.

Student Engagement

In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. The basis for the concept of "student engagement" is the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged." *Stronger student engagement* or *improved student engagement* are common instructional objectives expressed by educators.

Students engaged in their learning grasp what they learn at profound levels rather than surface levels.[23] Engaged students retain what they learn and can transfer

what they learn to new contexts. They learn at high levels and have a desire to persist in the work, even when it is difficult.[24]

Schools with a focus on engagement nurture deep learning rather than emphasize attendance and compliance. Real improvement in student learning can occur only as authentic engagement increases. Designing lessons that are authentic, focused on an end product, have clear expectations and standards, provide choice, protect students from adverse consequences, and provide opportunities for students to work and learn in community engage students in the tasks and deepen their learning – because they enjoy the work and complete it.

As teachers investigate and reflect on their classroom practices and assignments, they may complete checklists to determine if their students are truly engaged in the work or only ritually compliant, which results in low level and short-term learning.

Learning from Others

We recommend that Fairhope leadership teams review specific actions that the top ten schools systems take (found in The Top Ten Alabama School Systems section), identify those actions that would be helpful to them, and visit or talk with those schools and/or systems to learn more about how to implement the actions.

We further recommend that Fairhope school leadership teams and/or faculty talk with personnel from specific schools in the top ten school systems below. These schools perform at significantly higher levels in poverty and non-poverty sub-groups in specific subjects and grade levels, yet have similar percentages of poverty subgroups. For example, third-grade teachers at Fairhope Elementary School might talk with third-grade teachers at Margaret Yarbrough Elementary School in Auburn City, Heritage or Rainbow Elementary Schools in Madison City, and/or Arab Elementary School in Arab City to determine what specific math curriculum, what instructional methods, or what other strategies they use. The principal of Fairhope Elementary School should also talk with the principal of Margaret Yarbrough Elementary, Heritage Elementary, Rainbow Elementary, or Arab Elementary.

Fairhope School	Subject	Grade	Exemplary School
Fairhope Elementary J. Larry Newton	Math	3	Auburn – Margaret Yarbrough Madison City – Heritage, Rainbow Arab – Arab Elementary
	Reading	3	Madison City – Rainbow, Horizon, Mill Creek Arab – Arab Elementary
Fairhope Intermediate School J Larry Newton	Math	4	Madison City – Horizon, West Madison Homewood – Edgewood Arab – Arab Elementary

	Reading	4	Madison City – Horizon, Mill Creek Homewood – Hall Kent Arab – Arab Elementary
	Math	5	Madison City – Mill Creek, Horizon Homewood – Edgewood Shades Cahaba
	Reading	5	Homewood - Shades Cahaba Madison City – Columbia, Mill Creek
	Science	5	Madison City – Mill Creek, Horizon
	Math	6	Madison City – Heritage, Horizon Homewood – Homewood Middle
	Reading	6	Madison City – Horizon, Rainbow
Fairhope Middle School			
	Math	7	Homewood – Homewood Middle (31.66) Madison City – Discovery (23.88)
	Reading	7	Hoover – Simmons Middle
	Science	7	Hoover – Simmons Middle
	Math	8	Hoover – Simmons Middle
	Reading	8	Hoover – Simmons Middle, Berry Middle
Fairhope High School	English		Homewood – Homewood High, AP Hoover - Hoover High, ACT
	Reading		Homewood – Homewood High, AP Madison City - Bob Jones High, ACT
	Math		Homewood - Homewood High, AP and ACT Madison City - Bob Jones High, ACT
	Science		Homewood - Homewood High, AP Hoover - Spain Park High, ACT

Resources Required

The following essential resources are needed to support the recommendations, regardless of which of the options in the next section of this report is selected. Some of the recommendations require very little or no additional funding. Several require quite a bit more. These resources required are estimates, based on funds used by other school systems and best educational practice.

Professional Development

Currently the Baldwin County School System spends approximately $90,000 for professional development for all Baldwin County schools. The professional development Baldwin County provides with this funding is exceptionally well done. However, for Fairhope schools to move into the top ten tier, schools must provide targeted learning opportunities for all teachers and leaders, which would require professional development funding of approximately $80,000 per year.

The continuation of existing programs requires support and funding necessary to maintain the quality and integrity of the programs as well as meet the requirements of the organizations. Professional development and collaboration funds support the continuation of these programs.

- College Board Advanced Placement Courses (AP)
- College Board Laying the Foundation Courses (Pre-AP)
- Problem-Based Learning (PBL)
- Vertical Teaming

Teacher Collaborative Time

Funds needed for teacher collaborative time vary from school to school and from system to system. One system estimates the cost at from $50,000 to $75,000. The system that provides the most collaborative time for teachers estimates $1,500,000, most of that amount due to salaries and benefits. For the Fairhope schools, we would estimate cost for personnel needed to provide significant collaborative time for teachers at approximately $400,000 (see Personnel section below). The excellent student achievement results of this strategy, its relatively high cost, and the variability of cost estimates, makes thorough and precise pre-implementation planning crucial.

The amount of funds needed, however, depends on how the schools structure their collaborative times. If they schedule some collaborative times on separate days (Fairhope Elementary on one day, J. Larry Newton on another day, Fairhope High School on another day, for example), they could maximize the substitutes and might need less funding. Also, some of the schools are larger than others and will need more substitutes for teachers to have adequate release time to work together. In

summary, if processes are optimized and planning is detailed, Fairhope schools could achieve the same goals with significantly less than $400,000.

Lesson Study

The funding for professional development and teacher collaborative time supports training and time needed for lesson study. Therefore, lesson study requires no additional funding.

Looking at Student Work (LASW)

The funding for professional development and teacher collaborative time supports training and time needed for LASW. Therefore, LASW requires no additional funding.

Data Meetings

The funding for embedded teacher collaborative time supports data meetings. Therefore, data meetings require no additional funding.

Professional Learning Communities

Typically, funding for teacher collaborative time supports PLCs. Therefore, PLCs require no additional funding.

Personnel

Estimated salaries and benefits for additional personnel are shown in the table below. (See Appendix J for the personnel calculations and staffing model.)

Position	**Salary**
A position to oversee data use, curriculum, and instruction (such as assistant superintendent or director)	$130,000 (includes benefits)
Secretary	$49,400 (includes benefits)
Operating expenses	$18,000
Substitutes (25)	$405,000
Total new personnel funding	$602,400

Content Integration

Professional development funds ordinarily support teams of teachers working collaboratively to integrate their content. Therefore, the training requires no additional funding.

Marzano's High-Yield Instructional Strategies

Historically, funding for professional development supports training for Marzano's instructional strategies. Therefore, the training requires no additional funding.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Professional development funds support PBL training. Therefore, PBL requires no additional training funding. Incidental expenses for materials and supplies may arise, but the instructional budget should cover these.

Student Engagement

Funding for professional development supports teacher training in strategies that build student engagement. Therefore, the training requires no additional funding.

Learning from Others

The funds needed for this recommendation consist of travel for teachers and leaders to visit and benchmark with exemplary schools. Telephone conference calls can accomplish some of the benchmarking, but site visits are powerful learning experiences. Therefore, we recommend that several teacher teams from each school visit an exemplary school. Generally, funding consists of mileage and meals and occasionally an overnight stay.

Options to Increase Community Involvement In and Ownership Of Fairhope Schools

Leave the Current Structure Intact.

Fairhope's five schools are part of a countywide system that has 42 schools spread over 1,600 square miles. While the Fairhope schools exist as a feeder pattern within that system, operationally they are a loose confederation governed by countywide policies, having no separate educational approach or formal leadership structure of their own. This is not necessarily bad. Like many county school systems in Alabama, the Baldwin County system has comparatively low administrative overhead. While Fairhope's leaders aspire to improve their schools to top-ten status within Alabama, they might choose to do so by working within the current arrangements to implement the recommendations of this report. The risk, of course, is that the current structure may be part of the reason why Fairhope schools have not yet attained that top-ten status.

Create a School Tax District.

Fairhope schools are tied to the Baldwin County School System financially as well as operationally. Their local finances come mainly from property, sales, and business privilege taxes shared with virtually all of the rest of the county. There is no mechanism to raise funds from the feeder-pattern area to finance the schools serving that area. One way to create the capacity to provide additional funds for the Fairhope schools would be to form a school tax district that follows the boundaries of the feeder pattern of the five Fairhope schools. The Baldwin County School System has the discretionary power to create such a school tax district.

The Code of Alabama provides that a county board of education may approve the creation of a school tax district,[25] and the Constitution of Alabama authorizes the levy of up to six mills of special district property taxes when approved by the voters, with the proceeds to be expended for the exclusive benefit of the district. [26] While this option would improve the ability to finance the schools in the Fairhope feeder pattern, it would not address the need to create coherent educational policies and practices in those schools that would allow them to achieve top-ten status within the public school system of Alabama. The school tax district is simply a financial mechanism that would not affect the governance and operational control of the Fairhope schools, unless combined with one of the following two options.

Obtain a School Flexibility Contract with the State Board of Education.

A second option for increasing community involvement in and ownership of the Fairhope schools would be to implement a flexibility contract between the Baldwin County Board of Education and the State Board of Education. The purpose of this

flexibility contract would be to increase community involvement in and ownership of budgetary and programmatic decisions that are currently governed by state laws, regulations, and policies.

A number of local school systems have been successful in obtaining school flexibility contracts since the enactment of Act 2013-64, which authorized the State Board to waive certain state legal requirements. The Baldwin County Board of Education is one of those, having obtained approval in 2014 of its proposal to establish the Digital Renaissance Virtual School allowing flexible, personalized high school instruction.[27]

The flexibility contract approved for the Birmingham City Schools in 2014 included waivers of the type that would be advantageous for increasing local involvement in Fairhope schools. The purpose of that flexibility contract was to implement the Woodlawn Innovation Network (WIN), creating local control over one of the feeder patterns of that system. Included among the approved waivers were these:

- "In staffing schools in the Woodlawn Innovation Network, Birmingham City Schools will have flexibility to recruit and hire principals, guidance counselors and specialty teachers who possess the required skills to be successful in their respective roles, but may not possess traditional certifications."
- "School leaders in the Woodlawn Innovation Network will act as CEOs of their buildings:
    1. "Directly managing their full budgets and exercising flexibility in the way those funds are spent (flexibility in the value of earned teacher units).
    2. "This includes flexibility to ask all staff members to step out of their current roles and re-interview for positions in the newly transformed schools. This will give principals the ability to hire staff committed to the WIN design and outcomes." [28]

A recognized deficiency in the Birmingham plan is the absence of leadership and oversight to guide its implementation. A possible remedy for Fairhope would be the creation of an assistant superintendent or director position to lead the educational program within the feeder pattern, and perhaps the creation of an advisory oversight board similar to one required by the charter option discussed below. These improvements could be added to the Innovation Plan for Fairhope schools.

The process for obtaining a Fairhope school flexibility contract would involve developing an Innovation Plan that addresses specific issues in the state application and securing a supporting resolution from the Baldwin County Board of Education, along with formal assurance that the County Board will provide leadership for the performance framework defined in the Plan.[29] This process is similar to converting Fairhope schools into public charter schools, but it is less formal and requires less separation of the Fairhope feeder pattern from the rest of the Baldwin system.

Create a Fairhope Charter School Organization.

A third way to implement local governance of the operation of Fairhope schools would be to convert the Fairhope schools to a five-school charter "organization." This option is new and has not yet resulted in the creation of any charter schools; thus, its provisions are only beginning to be tested.

Theoretically, the benefits of this conversion are:

- Flexibility in educational programming and school processes
- Control over the budget and facilities
- Greater autonomy over employee selection and terms
- Ability to innovate in any area
- Greater inclusion of parents
- Control of school environment, student enrollment, and discipline

The Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Act 2015-3) allows the conversion of existing public schools into "public charter schools." By registering with the State Department of Education as an "authorizer," the Baldwin County Board of Education could qualify to initiate the conversion of the five Fairhope schools to charter status.[30]

The conversion process would begin with the County Board issuing a request for proposals to manage the Fairhope public charter schools.[31] The responding application should come from a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. This would position the applicant to meet the statutory requirement for governance of the charter organization.[32] The Fairhope Education Advisory Committee is ideally positioned to apply for 501(c)(3) status with the I.R.S. and become the applying organization. Its bylaws could be tailored to provide sound membership requirements and appointment methods for the governing board.

Upon approval of the charter application by the Baldwin County Board of Education, an independent board would govern the operation of the Fairhope charter schools. The governing board would have a charter contract with the County Board and each of the schools,[33] which would allow the five Fairhope schools to be operated together as part of the same organization under the governance of a single board.

As public charter schools, the Fairhope schools would have autonomy over decisions concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, instruction, and procurement, among other matters.[34] They would be exempt from the state's education statutes and any state or local rule, regulation, policy, or procedure that otherwise applies to the public schools, with certain exceptions.[35]

The Fairhope public charter schools would remain as part of the Baldwin County School System.[36] However, their relationship to the Baldwin County Board of Education would be based on a performance contract for each school.[37] The County

Board would oversee this performance framework and receive fees for doing so,[38] but would no longer maintain day-to-day control over school operations. Instead, the Fairhope charter schools would have academic goals and standards for measuring their performance that would be specified in the charter contracts.[39] They would have to give the same standardized assessments as other schools.[40]

The Fairhope charter schools would, subject to capacity constraints, give enrollment preference first to students who reside within the existing Fairhope feeder pattern, then to students residing within the rest of Baldwin County. If there were additional capacity, they would then use a random process to enroll other students.[41]

The Fairhope charter schools would be able to operate services directly or contract with the Baldwin County Board or others, subject to certain limitations in the act.[42]

To ensure that Fairhope charter schools would continue to receive their fair share of available funds, the Baldwin County Board of Education would be required to provide the same amount of state funds per student to the Fairhope charter schools as to other schools. It would provide the same amount of local tax revenue per student to the Fairhope charter schools as to other public schools, excluding earmarked capital and debt service funds. The State Department of Education would provide Fairhope charter schools their proportionate share of federal categorical aid, special education funds, and state transportation funds.[43]

Create a Fairhope City School System.

Alabama's school laws require each of the state's 67 counties to operate a county school system administered by the county board of education.[44] However, any municipality within the county that has attained a population of 5,000 may decide to separate from the county system, creating a city board of education to control the schools located within its jurisdiction.[45] This would include Fairhope Elementary, Fairhope Intermediate, Fairhope Middle, and Fairhope High schools. It would not include J. Larry Newton School, which is located outside the city limits of Fairhope.

The attendance district for a Fairhope City School System, initially based on the city limits, would significantly reduce the number of students currently attending the four schools involved, and would affect their staffing.

Under the law, a Fairhope city school system would receive directly any district property taxes attributable to property within the city limits. However, the county board would retain any district revenues needed to retire outstanding school debt attributable to the city schools. This would include significant obligations for school warrants issued in 2007.

A Fairhope city school system would participate in the state Foundation Program

and would also have access to federal funds available to public school systems. On the other hand, it would be expected to cover its own administrative expenses and facility operating costs now borne by the county school system.

In general, separating from county school administration by creating a city school system would offer Fairhope the greatest expansion of local control over its schools, but also would require the city and its taxpayers to bear the greatest increase in responsibility for administrative and operating expenses that now are covered by the county.

Conclusion

In today's environment, organizations that do not respond to the rapidly changing dynamics with actions and practices that work risk obsolescence. The educational community is in a similar situation. Students in the United States often perform at lower academic levels than their international counterparts (Gonzales et al., 2008). High-performing school systems throughout the nation as well as the top ten Alabama school systems consistently Focus on Direction, Build a Powerful Organization, Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action, Give Life to Data, and Lead Learning.

Discussions of student-focused teaching and learning in the top ten school systems often lead to side-conversations containing the questions *how does that look*, or *what identifiers show that a school system focuses on students and their learning*? These top ten school systems provide a sampling of *how it looks* and highlight *a focus on students and their learning.* Leaders in these school systems recognize that educators arrive at work each day hoping to make a difference in the lives of students.

Fairhope educators are working every day to achieve these same objectives. They are doing many outstanding things to serve students and provide them with the very best education possible. We can all learn, however, from each other, and the top ten school systems offer much that will be helpful to Fairhope educators.

Our recommendations, based on exemplary practices of the top ten consistently highest performing systems in the state, as well as on current research about how to improve student learning, are:

1. Provide high-quality, targeted, research-based professional development for teachers and administrators.
2. Continue effective data meetings at the school level and implement effective data meetings at the five-school organizational level.
3. Provide substantial, structured, and regular time for collaboration for teachers at each school.
4. Recruit and hire an instructional/data leader for Fairhope schools.

Fairhope schools have dedicated leaders, committed teachers, and supportive community members. It is our belief that Fairhope schools are potentially poised, if they implement these recommendations, to move into the group of highest performing schools in the state.

Appendix A: Five Critical Practices: School Systems that Improve Student Learning

Critical Practice 1: Focus on Direction.

1.1. Creating an organizational culture

- *Developing positive and productive relationships with stakeholders*
- *Facilitating conversations among stakeholders*
- *Encouraging and modeling conversations and actions that build trust and support diversity*
- *Creating a shared culture of caring, communication, and collaboration*

1.2. Working with others to support, encourage, or require high performance

- *Setting expectations that promote high levels of performance in every area*
- *Ensuring that everyone has actionable improvement goals*
- *Establishing processes to monitor implementation of expectations and goals*
- *Providing feedback, direction, and support to strengthen performance*

1.3. Using a vision, mission, and strategic plan to make decisions and inform actions

- *Collaborating with others to develop a mission, vision, and strategic plan that reflect the beliefs, ethics, and focus of the organization*
- *Ensuring that current and future practices are consistent with the vision and mission and are based on the strategic plan*
- *Looking outside the norm for more effective ways of achieving the mission, vision, and strategic plan*
- *Leading conversations about vision and mission to support the direction of the organization*

Critical Practice 2: Build a Powerful Organization.

2.1 Working with others to create a powerful organizational structure

- *Diagnosing the current condition of the organization*
- *Creating and securing order*
- *Engaging stakeholders in formal and informal conversations regarding the school or system environment*
- *Collaborating with stakeholders to monitor the effectiveness of processes and procedures*

2.2 Leading an organization in becoming agile and flexible

- *Engaging others in reflective processes*
- *Creating risk-free opportunities to develop solutions to problems*
- *Encouraging open and professional dialogue to confront obstacles that stall progress*
- *Engaging stakeholders in discussions for out-of-the-box answers to difficult problems*

2.3 Leading others in developing, maintaining, and improving processes that increase the effectiveness of the organization

- *Engaging stakeholders in discussions of performance effectiveness in all areas*
  Identify areas that matter most and are worth measuring
- *Engaging others in accurately measuring improvement in areas of most importance*
- *Leading others in making mid-course adjustments for improvement*

Critical Practice 3: Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action.

1.1 Creating a vision and culture that focus on student learning and student needs

- *Leading stakeholders in crafting a student-centered vision*
- *Ensuring that learning is the focus of student work*
- *Facilitating the development of processes that support student learning*
- *Leading faculty and staff in maintaining a focus on student learning*

1.2 Providing instructional leadership

- *Coordinating faculty and staff experiences that enhance learning for all*
- *Facilitating conversations regarding challenging, attainable learning experiences*
- *Modeling and encouraging mutual respect among stakeholders*
- *Ensuring growth in best teaching practices that result in high levels of learning*

1.3 Leading the development of guidelines and procedures for learning

- *Leading the design of standards-based learning that addresses the variety of student needs*
- *Ensuring the development of active, experiential learning opportunities for students*
- *Facilitating an identification of essential skills and knowledge students must learn*
- *Creating opportunities for faculty to collaborate on lessons, units, and assessments*

Critical Practice 4: Give Life to Data.

4.1 Ensuring that key data are analyzed in a deliberate manner

- *Ensuring the availability of data and information*
- *Providing regular opportunities to collaboratively analyze key data*
- *Ensuring the use of effective tools to collaboratively analyze key data*
- *Reviewing data analysis and use on a regular basis*

4.2. Using data and current research to improve student learning

- *Facilitating faculty conversations about connections between teaching practices and student data*
- *Ensuring the development of teaching strategies in response to the data*
- *Focusing on recent research in the field and implications for instruction*
- *Ensuring that data used impacts student learning*

4.3. Communicating key data to all stakeholders

- *Ensuring transparency and clarity of the data*
- *Establishing processes to deploy key data to stakeholders*
- *Developing stakeholder understanding of key data*
- *Communicating with stakeholders about data*

Critical Practice 5: Lead learning.

5.1 Establishing an environment of daily learning for all

- *Modeling collaboration, reflection, and knowledge sharing in daily practice*
- *Leading a shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning*
- *Rewarding formal and informal collaboration and knowledge sharing*
- *Maintaining systematic processes for sharing knowledge*

5.2 Challenging the status quo and working with others to achieve change goals

- *Inviting different perspectives from others by asking the right questions and listening to the answers*
- *Creating a sense of urgency about positive change and improvement in every area*
- *Empowering others to remove barriers to change*
- *Encouraging conversations about new ideas for improvement*

5.3 Implementing methods to motivate, support, and/or encourage innovation

- *Creating opportunities for the generation of new ideas and creation of meaningful change*
- *Working with others to create a culture of innovation*
- *Celebrating new ideas, even if the outcomes are not always successful*
- *Investing resources in supporting innovation*

Appendix B: Fairhope and the Top Ten School Systems

This table shows the top-ten systems and the Fairhope feeder pattern according to their ranks on the 2015 Aspire Math, Reading, and Science Tests in grades 3-8, and the ACT College Readiness Assessments in English, Reading, Math, and Science for the 2015 graduating class. There are 14 Aspire rankings and 4 ACT rankings in the comparison.

The highest four systems (Mt. Brook, Vestavia Hills, Madison, Homewood) were ranked within the top ten in all cases. The next three (Auburn, Cullman, Muscle Shoals) were always ranked in or very close to the top ten. The remaining three systems in the top ten sometimes missed top-ten rankings, but were always ranked in the highest twenty.

Fairhope's rankings were sometimes among the highest ten systems, and in all but five cases were in the top fifteen. In eleven cases, it ranked higher than one or more of the top ten, but never outranked a top-four system. Reading was Fairhope's weakest performance; it was strongest in Science and the College Readiness measures.

	System-Level, All-Students Rank on Assessments (Black = top 10, Red = lower ranks)										
	Top Ten School Systems Based on Rankings on 2015 Assessments										Fairhope Feeder
	Mt. Brook	Vestavia Hills	Madison City	Home-wood	Auburn	Cullman City	Muscle Shoals	Hoover	Arab	Truss-ville	
	ASPIRE Math Rank, 2015										
Grade 3	1	2	3	7	6	9	8	12	4	5	13
Grade 4	1	3	9	6	7	4	11	14	13	8	24
Grade 5	1	3	5	4	6	9	10	16	13	12	14
Grade 6	1	2	8	4	6	15	5	11	14	16	13
Grade 7	1	2	4	3	11	5	6	7	14	16	9
Grade 8	1	2	7	4	10	5	8	6	12	13	11
	ASPIRE Reading Rank, 2015										
Grade 3	1	2	3	4	6	9	7	11	8	5	12
Grade 4	2	1	4	3	12	15	5	11	7	8	50
Grade 5	2	1	3	4	6	10	14	7	5	8	25
Grade 6	1	3	2	6	11	12	4	10	5	16	22
Grade 7	1	2	3	6	7	4	8	5	10	18	11
Grade 8	3	1	6	4	9	2	8	7	5	17	18
	ASPIRE Science Rank, 2015										
Grade 5	1	2	3	8	6	11	19	18	5	7	10
Grade 7	1	2	3	4	8	6	9	7	12	14	5
	ACT College Readiness Rank, 2015										
English	1	2	3	8	17	10	13	4	6	7	9
Reading	1	2	3	5	18	7	8	4	10	11	6
Math	1	2	3	5	6	8	7	4	10	18	13
Science	1	2	3	5	11	12	22	4	10	6	8

Appendix C: 2015 Aspire and ACT Analysis

This table compares assessment results for the five Fairhope feeder-pattern schools with average results for schools in the systems ranked among the top ten. For example: In Fairhope Elementary School, 67.56% of grade 3 math test-takers met the proficiency standard, compared to 79.28% in the average top-ten school. The gap between these was 11.72 percentage points, and the Fairhope performance was 85% of the top-ten average.

Fairhope schools trailed the top-ten average in all but one comparison (7th grade science), typically by double digits in terms of the proficiency gap. Measured as a proficiency ratio, the Fairhope schools' results were most often fifteen percent or more below the top-ten average. However, Fairhope's proficiency ratio was at least ninety percent of the top-ten average in seven of the 27 comparisons in the table.

Summary Comparison of Proficiency on Aspire and ACT Tests: Fairhope Schools vs. Schools in Top 10 Systems

School, Grade, and Subject	% Proficient on Aspire & ACT Tests		Comparison of Fairhope to Top 10 Avg.	
	Fairhope School	Average School in Top 10 Systems	Proficiency Gap (Fairhope - Top 10 Avg.)	Proficiency Ratio (Fairhope / Top 10 Avg.)
Fairhope Elementary				
03 Math	67.56	79.28	-11.72	85%
03 Reading	46.95	61.24	-14.29	77%
J. Larry Newton				
03 Math	73.33	79.28	-5.95	92%
04 Math	47.31	73.54	-26.23	64%
05 Math	58.72	70.93	-12.21	83%
06 Math	57.57	78.48	-20.91	73%
03 Reading	45.34	61.24	-15.90	77%
04 Reading	33.34	64.63	-31.29	52%
05 Reading	37.61	59.65	-22.04	63%
06 Reading	42.42	73.56	-31.14	58%
05 Science	50.46	61.94	-11.48	81%
Fairhope Intermediate				
04 Math	61.29	73.54	-12.25	83%
05 Math	58.96	70.93	-11.97	83%
06 Math	70.72	78.48	-7.76	90%
04 Reading	40.51	64.63	-24.12	63%
05 Reading	41.79	59.65	-17.86	70%
06 Reading	56.43	73.56	-17.13	77%
05 Science	56.71	61.94	-5.23	92%
Fairhope Middle				
07 Math	60.82	66.69	-5.87	91%
08 Math	47.41	61.74	-14.33	77%
07 Reading	49.12	60.83	-11.71	81%
08 Reading	54.95	69.61	-14.66	79%
07 Science	61.34	60.99	0.35	101%
Fairhope High				
ACT English	75.72	79.84	-4.12	95%
ACT Reading	54.95	58.23	-3.28	94%
ACT Math	38.97	51.96	-12.99	75%
ACT Science	41.21	49.93	-8.72	83%

Appendix D: Aspire Math Point Gap Summary

This table breaks apart the math proficiency gap between Fairhope and top-ten schools, measuring the size of gaps attributable to poverty and non-poverty student subgroups. The yellow highlights indicate where the large gaps are (10 points or more), and the red headers summarize the findings.

While it might seem logical to expect that lagging math performance among students from poverty backgrounds would be responsible for the gap between Fairhope schools and Alabama's top systems, the results are much more complex.

In J. Larry Newton School, for instance, the large gaps in grades 4-6 are entirely attributable to the performance of the non-poverty student subgroup. Gaps in grade 3 are smaller.

Math performance in relation to top-ten schools also appears related more to grade level than to student subgroups in the Elementary, Intermediate, and Middle schools. In grades 6 and 7, math gaps are relatively small, while they are larger in grades 3, 5, and 8.

MATH	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
The math gap in J. Larry Newton School is larger in the Non-Poverty Subgroup.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	79.28	73.54	70.93	78.48		
J. Larry Newton School	73.33	47.31	58.72	57.57		
Point Gap	5.95	26.23	12.21	20.91		
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	88.91	80.52	77.49	83.43		
J. Larry Newton School	86.05	46.94	66.67	65.39		
Point Gap	2.86	33.58	10.82	18.04		
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	61.06	50.10	48.68	54.88		
J. Larry Newton School	56.25	47.73	45.00	48.93		
Point Gap	4.81	2.37	3.68	5.95		
The math gap in Fairhope Elementary is more complex, involving both subgroups.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	79.28					
Fairhope Elementary	67.56					
Point Gap	11.72					
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	88.91					
Fairhope Elementary	77.13					
Point Gap	11.78					
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	61.06					
Fairhope Elementary	43.24					
Point Gap	17.82					
The math gap in Fairhope Intermediate is higher in grades 4 and 5 and among the Poverty Subgroup.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		73.54	70.93	78.48		
Fairhope Intermediate		61.29	58.96	70.72		
Point Gap		12.25	11.97	7.76		
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		80.52	77.49	83.43		
Fairhope Intermediate		72.40	66.99	78.84		
Point Gap		8.12	10.50	4.59		
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		50.10	48.68	54.88		
Fairhope Intermediate		36.78	33.84	47.23		
Point Gap		13.32	14.84	7.65		
The math gap in Fairhope Middle is higher in the 8th grade.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					66.69	61.74
Fairhope Middle					60.82	47.41
Point Gap					5.87	14.33
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					74.07	67.74
Fairhope Middle					70.54	55.59
Point Gap					3.53	12.15
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					41.96	32.42
Fairhope Middle					37.62	22.77
Point Gap					4.34	9.65

Appendix E: Aspire Reading Point Gap Summary

This table breaks apart the reading proficiency gap between Fairhope and top-ten schools in the same way as the preceding table in Appendix D.

Again, the results show that a large portion of the performance gap is attributable to the non-poverty subgroup of students in the Fairhope schools.

The first thing to note is that when we look at the Aspire data, relatively large gaps between the top ten schools and Fairhope schools are more common in reading than in math.

The reading gaps in J. Larry Newton School are larger for the non-poverty subgroup in all four grades tested, and the same is true for 3rd grade in Fairhope Elementary. The results are more mixed in the Intermediate and Middle schools, where both student subgroups contribute to the gaps.

READING	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
The reading gap in J. Larry Newton School is higher among the Non-Poverty Subgroup.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	61.24	64.63	59.65	73.56		
J. Larry Newton School	45.34	33.34	37.61	42.42		
Point Gap	15.90	31.29	22.04	31.14		
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	69.04	71.59	67.11	79.07		
J. Larry Newton School	58.14	38.00	46.31	50.00		
Point Gap	10.90	33.59	20.80	29.07		
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	36.70	39.73	31.72	50.09		
J. Larry Newton School	28.13	27.92	22.50	34.05		
Point Gap	8.57	11.81	9.22	16.04		
The reading gap in Fairhope Elementary also is higher among Non-Poverty students.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	61.24					
Fairhope Elementary	46.95					
Point Gap	14.29					
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	69.04					
Fairhope Elementary	52.91					
Point Gap	16.13					
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools	36.70					
Fairhope Elementary	31.51					
Point Gap	5.19					
The reading gap is high among both student subgroups in Fairhope Intermediate.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		64.63	59.65	73.56		
Fairhope Intermediate		40.51	41.79	56.43		
Point Gap		24.12	17.86	17.13		
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		71.59	67.11	79.07		
Fairhope Intermediate		49.48	50.25	66.83		
Point Gap		22.11	16.86	12.24		
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools		39.73	31.72	50.09		
Fairhope Intermediate		20.69	15.38	26.39		
Point Gap		19.04	16.34	23.70		
The reading gap in Fairhope Middle is higher in 8th grade.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					60.83	69.61
Fairhope Middle					49.12	54.95
Point Gap					11.71	14.66
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					68.03	74.56
Fairhope Middle					56.43	63.15
Point Gap					11.60	11.41
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					37.26	49.19
Fairhope Middle					31.68	30.00
Point Gap					5.58	19.19

Appendix F: Aspire Science Point Gap Summary

This table presents data that describe the gap between Fairhope and top ten schools on Aspire science results for grades 5 and 7, the only two grades for this assessment. In J. Larry Newton School, the science gap in grade 5 is attributable to the non-poverty subgroup; the poverty subgroup results actually exceed the top-ten average. The science gap in Fairhope Intermediate is small and also attributable to the non-poverty subgroup. There is no science gap in the Fairhope Middle School results.

SCIENCE	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
The Science gap in J. Larry Newton School exists only among the non-poverty subgroup.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			61.94			
J. Larry Newton School			50.46			
Point Gap			11.48			
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			74.34			
J. Larry Newton School			56.52			
Point Gap			17.82			
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			33.42			
J. Larry Newton School			40.00			
Point Gap			-6.58			
Similarly, the Science gap is a non-poverty issue in Fairhope Intermediate.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			61.94			
Fairhope Intermediate			56.71			
Point Gap			5.23			
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			74.34			
Fairhope Intermediate			64.53			
Point Gap			9.81			
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools			33.42			
Fairhope Intermediate			32.30			
Point Gap			1.12			
There is no Science gap in Fairhope Middle.						
ALL STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					60.99	
Fairhope Middle					61.34	
Point Gap					-0.35	
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					71.07	
Fairhope Middle					68.66	
Point Gap					2.41	
POVERTY STUDENTS						
Average of Top 10 Schools					37.25	
Fairhope Middle					38.24	
Point Gap					-0.99	

Appendix G: ACT College Readiness Point Gap Summary

This table presents data that break apart the ACT college-readiness gaps between Fairhope schools and the top-ten average. The all-student data, shown at the top of this table and taken from Appendix C, indicate that only in math results is there a large gap between Fairhope High School and the high schools in Alabama's top systems. Here we see that the primary source of that gap is the performance of non-poverty students.

ACT COLLEGE READINESS	English	Reading	Math	Science
The ACT college readiness gap is large primarily in Math.				
ALL STUDENTS				
Average of Top 10 Schools	79.84	58.23	51.96	49.93
Fairhope High School	75.72	54.95	38.97	41.21
Point Gap	4.12	3.28	12.99	8.72
NON-POVERTY STUDENTS				
Average of Top 10 Schools	84.87	51.06	57.37	54.87
Fairhope High School	82.37	42.35	45.49	47.96
Point Gap	2.50	8.71	11.88	6.91
POVERTY STUDENTS				
Average of Top 10 Schools	54.18	36.06	24.08	24.62
Fairhope High School	52.18	30.43	15.94	17.40
Point Gap	2.00	5.63	8.14	7.22

Appendix H: 2014 AP Data

The tables below contain information on Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings and success rates in Fairhope High School during the 2014 school year, as derived from information provided by the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) to the State of Alabama. The data were obtained from A+ College Ready, which is involved with AP program administration in our state. At the time we obtained the data, this was the most recent year for which comparative data for all Alabama high schools were available.

AP Course Offerings

ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSE	H.S. IN TOP TEN SYSTEMS OFFERING THE COURSE IN 2014	OFFERED IN FAIRHOPE HIGH SCHOOL?
Biology	12	Yes
Calculus AB	12	Yes
Chemistry	12	Yes
English Language/Composition	12	Yes
English Literature/Composition	12	Yes
History US	12	Yes
Government & Politics: U.S.	11	Yes
Statistics	11	Yes
Calculus BC	10	
Economics: Macro	10	
Physics B	9	Yes
Spanish Language	9	
Environmental Science	7	
Physics C: Mechanics	7	
Psychology	7	
Studio Art: 2-D Design	7	
Computer Science A	6	
French Language	6	
Physics C: E&M	6	
History: European	5	
Latin: Vergil	5	
Music Theory	5	
Economics: Micro	4	
History: World	4	Yes
Studio Art: Drawing	3	Yes
Human Geography	2	
Art History	1	
Chinese Language	1	
German Language	1	
Govt. & Politics: Comparative	1	
Spanish Literature	1	
Studio Art: 3D Design	1	

Source: Calculated from data provided to Alabama by NMSI.

One measure of the quality of an AP program in any high school is the number of courses offered, which is a measure of the choices available to students. Statewide, there were 32 AP courses offered in 2014 by one or more high schools. This table shows the concentration of these AP course offerings among the twelve high schools operated by the top ten school systems, and compares Fairhope High School's AP offerings.

All twelve of the high schools in the top ten systems offered six AP courses in 2014 (Biology, Calculus AB, Chemistry, English Language, English Literature, and US History). Fairhope High School also offered these six AP courses. Another ten AP courses were offered by more than half (7 to 11) of the high schools in top-ten systems. Fairhope offered only three of these ten. These data suggest that Fairhope High's AP offerings are concentrated in the courses most commonly found in top-ten systems, but its students do not have access to all AP offerings available to a majority of top-ten schools.

AP Success Rates

AP program success can also be measured by student enrollment and passing rates on end-of-course exams. The table below compares Fairhope High School to the twelve high schools in top-ten systems on these measures. The high schools are arranged by the number of AP courses offered in 2014. The number of AP courses offered in 2014 determines the order of the high schools listed.

Mountain Brook, at 25 AP courses, ranked first. Fairhope, at 11 AP courses, offered its students fewer AP choices than all but two of the high schools in top-ten systems. The AP headcount enrollment was lower in relation to student enrollment in grades 10-12 than all but three of the high schools in top-ten systems (Hoover, Cullman, and Arab), as shown by the enrollment ratios in the table. And the passing rate for students taking the final exam on AP courses was lower than all but one of the high schools in top-ten systems (Muscle Shoals).

Advance Placement Comparisons, 2014	2014	Advanced Placement Totals, 2014				
Fairhope vs.High Schools	Enrollment	Courses	Headcount	Number	Enrollment	Passing
in Top Ten Systems	Grades 10-12	Offered	Enrollment (1)	Who Passed (2)	Ratio (3)	Percentage
Mountain Brook High School	1,024	25	895	765	0.87	85%
Vestavia Hills High School	1,386	22	728	605	0.53	83%
Bob Jones High School (Madison)	1,471	22	1,292	779	0.88	60%
Auburn High School	1,625	22	906	418	0.56	46%
Homewood High School	741	20	611	426	0.82	70%
Hoover High School	1,979	20	764	442	0.39	58%
James Clemens High School (Madison)	1,008	19	758	450	0.75	59%
Spain Park High School (Hoover)	1,176	17	750	487	0.64	65%
Hewitt-Trussville High School	1,052	16	629	337	0.60	54%
Cullman High School	644	12	275	126	0.43	46%
Fairhope High School	*1,060*	*11*	*529*	*195*	*0.50*	*37%*
Arab High School	657	10	283	114	0.43	40%
Muscle Shoals High School	657	7	389	125	0.59	32%
Source: Calculated from data provided to Alabama by National Math & Science Initiative (NMSI).						
Notes:						
(1) Students are counted in each AP course where they are enrolled.						
(2) Passing score is 3 or better on a scale of 1 to 5.						
(3) Ratio of AP course headcount enrollment to total enrollment in grades 10-12.						

Appendix I: Core Expenditures Per Student, FY 2016

This table compares the Baldwin County System with Alabama's top-ten school systems in terms of core academic expenditures per student in FY 2016. Core academic expenditures include all operating expenditures except the auxiliary categories (mainly food service and transportation), which are removed because they would distort academic comparisons. Core expenditures can be further divided into those that are related to instruction, facility operations, and central administration. They include expenditures made at the system level as well as in the schools directly.

Baldwin County's core expenditures per student are lower than in eight of the top ten systems, primarily because the amount allocated to instruction and instructional support is low and the amount allocated to facility operations is high. In percentage terms, the Baldwin County System is lower in the instructional category than nine of the other systems in the table. On the other hand, its facility-related operations percentage is higher than all of the other systems in the table.

CORE EXPENDITURES PER STUDENT, FY 2016							
System	Instruction + Instructional Support	Facility Operations	Central Adminis-tration	Core Expenditure Total	Percent Instructional	Percent Facility Operations	Percent Central Adminis-tration
Mt. Brook	$ 10,261	$ 1,209	$ 517	$ 11,987	86%	10%	4%
Homewood	8,491	1,204	527	10,223	83%	12%	5%
Hoover	8,344	1,217	237	9,799	85%	12%	2%
Vestavia Hills	7,936	922	530	9,388	85%	10%	6%
Muscle Shoals	7,074	1,055	484	8,613	82%	12%	6%
Madison	7,134	947	299	8,380	85%	11%	4%
Arab	7,142	833	363	8,338	86%	10%	4%
Auburn	7,172	800	336	8,308	86%	10%	4%
Baldwin Co.	*6,544*	*1,233*	*300*	*8,077*	*81%*	*15%*	*4%*
Trussville	6,434	838	751	8,022	80%	10%	9%
Cullman	6,252	789	543	7,583	82%	10%	7%

Appendix J: Model for Personnel Calculations and Staffing

Research shows that teacher time spent in analysis of student data followed by focused collaborative work designing meaningful opportunities for students ensures the greatest opportunity for profound changes in student achievement. This research supports the findings from each of the top ten districts in the state. Ongoing, protected, and meaningful collaboration results in changed teacher practices, which results in enhanced student learning.

Therefore, the greatest investment for improving student achievement is creating structures that provide collaborative teacher time. The most efficient method implemented by many schools is providing substitute teachers to release classroom teachers for the allotted collaborative time. The following calculations provide a basis for predicting personnel costs.

Director/Assistant Superintendent
Secretary to the Director

Salary requirements include $197,400 ($138,000 for salaries, plus $41,400 in benefits, and $18,000 in operating expenses).

- $100,000 for the director plus $30,000 in benefits
- $38,000 for the secretary plus $11,400 in benefits
- $18,000 in operating expenses (an estimate)

Substitutes

Salary requirements include approximately $405,000

- $2,250 for 25 subs (30 hours per week) @ $90 per day ($83 plus 0.0765 for Social Security)
- $405,000 for the year (180 days)

Staffing

Disparity among the class sizes in schools serving elementary-aged students may indicate a need to reevaluate staffing in those schools.

Fairhope Elementary

Grade	*# of classrooms*	*Average Enrollment per Classroom* *
K	13	18
1	13	20
2	14	20
3	12	20

Newton Elementary

Grade	*# of classrooms*	*Average Enrollment per Classroom* *
K	4	19
1	4	20
2	5	16
3	4	19
4	4	21
5	4	25
6	4	28

Fairhope Intermediate

Grade	*# of classrooms*	*Average Enrollment per Classroom* *
4	10	26
5	9	32
6	9	31

*Numbers obtained from an advisory report communicated to the county

Appendix K: School or System Inventory

Always – regularly, continually, intentionally, formally, and informally; daily
Often – regularly, consistently, intentionally, formally, and informally; at least weekly
Sometimes – intentionally, formally, and informally; monthly
Rarely – infrequent
Never – not at all

1. Focus on direction.

Standard	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.1 Creating an organizational culture					
We have positive and productive relationships with stakeholders.					
We participate in conversations among stakeholders.					
We participate in conversations and actions that build trust and support diversity.					
We demonstrate a shared culture of caring, communication, and collaboration.					
1.2 Working with others to support, encourage, or require high performance					
Our expectations promote high levels of performance in every area.					
Everyone* has actionable improvement goals.					
We use processes to monitor implementation of expectations and goals.					
Everyone receives feedback, direction, and support to strengthen performance.					
1.3 Using a vision, mission, and strategic plan to make decisions and inform actions					
Our mission, vision, and strategic plan reflect the beliefs, ethics, and focus of the organization.					
Our practices are consistent with the vision and mission and based on the strategic plan.					
We look outside the norm for more effective ways of integrating the mission, vision, and strategic plan.					
We participate in conversations about vision and mission to support the direction of the organization.					

2. Build a powerful organization.

Standard	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2.1 Working with others to create a powerful organizational structure					
We collaborate to diagnose the current condition of the organization.					
We create and secure order.					
We participate with stakeholders in formal and informal conversations regarding the school or system environment.					
We collaborate with stakeholders to monitor the effectiveness of processes and procedures.					
2.2 Leading an organization in becoming agile and flexible					
We engage in reflective processes.					
We have risk-free opportunities to develop solutions to problems.					
We participate in open and professional dialogue to confront obstacles that stall progress.					
We discuss with stakeholders out-of-the-box answers to difficult problems.					
2.3 Leading others in developing, maintaining, and improving processes that increase the effectiveness of the organization					
We discuss performance effectiveness in all areas.					
We identify areas that matter most and are worth measuring.					
We accurately measure improvement in areas of most importance.					
We make mid-course adjustments for improvement.					

3. Ensure student-focused vision and action.

Standard	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3.1 Creating a vision and culture that focus on student learning and student needs					
We have a student-centered vision.					
Learning is the focus of student work.					
We develop processes that support student learning.					
We participate in maintaining a student learning focus.					
3.2 Providing instructional leadership					
We have continuous learning experiences that enhance learning for all.					
We participate in conversations regarding challenging, attainable learning experiences.					
Mutual respect among stakeholders is the norm.					
We demonstrate improvement in best teaching practices that result in high levels of learning.					
3.3 Leading the development of guidelines and procedures for learning					
We collaborate to design standards-based learning that addresses the variety of student needs.					
We provide active, experiential learning opportunities for students.					
We identify the essential skills and knowledge students must learn.					
We collaborate on lessons, units, and assessments.					

4. Give life to data.

Standard	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4.1 Ensuring that key data are analyzed in a deliberate manner					
We have access to data and information.					
We have regular opportunities to analyze key data collaboratively.					
We use effective tools to analyze key data collaboratively.					
We review on a regular basis data analysis and the effective use of the data.					
4.2 Using data and current research to improve student learning					
We participate in conversations about connections between teaching practices and student data.					
We develop teaching strategies in response to the data.					
We focus on recent research in the field and implications for instruction.					
The data that we use impact student learning.					
4.3 Communicating key data to all stakeholders					
Our data are transparent and clear.					
We have processes to deploy key data to stakeholders.					
Stakeholders understand key data.					
We communicate with stakeholders about data.					

5. Lead Learning.

Standard	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5.1 Establishing an environment of daily learning for all					
We collaborate, reflect, and share knowledge.					
Our focus is on learning rather than on teaching.					
We reward formal and informal collaboration and knowledge sharing.					
We use systematic processes for sharing knowledge.					
5.2 Challenging the status quo and working with others to achieve change goals					
We invite different perspectives by asking the right questions and listening to the answers.					
We have a sense of urgency about positive change and improvement in every area.					
We are empowered to remove barriers to change.					
We participate in conversations about new ideas for improvement.					
5.3 Implementing methods to motivate, support, and/or encourage innovation.					
We have opportunities to generate new ideas and create meaningful change.					
We collaborate to create a culture of innovation.					
We celebrate new ideas, even if the outcomes are not always successful.					
We invest resources in supporting innovation.					

* Everyone includes leaders, faculty, staff, and students.

Endnotes

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[25] Code of Alabama, Section 16-13-191. *In order to make it possible to work out a system of local tax units adapted to the needs of the whole county, the county board of education of its own initiative shall fix the boundaries of any school tax district within its jurisdiction in which it is proposed to levy a local school tax.*

[26] Constitution of Alabama, Amendment 3. *Section 2. The several school district of any county in the state shall have power to levy and collect a special district tax not exceeding thirty cents on each one hundred dollars worth of taxable property in such district for public school purposes; provided, that a school district under the meaning of this section shall include incorporated cities or towns, or any school district of which an incorporated city or town is a part, or such other school districts now existing or hereafter formed as may be approved by the county board of education…..*

Amendment 382. *In addition to any and all taxes now authorized, or that may be hereafter authorized by the Constitution and laws of Alabama, the several school districts of any in the state shall have power to levy and collect an additional special district school tax not exceeding thirty cents on each one hundred dollars worth of taxable property in such district for public school purposes in addition to that now authorized or that may hereafter be authorized for public school purposes….*

[27] https://www.alsde.edu/Innovations Applications/Baldwin County Innovation Zone Application_5-14-14_Approved.pdf

[28] https://www.alsde.edu/Innovations%20Applications/Birmingham%20City%20Innovation%20Zone%20Flexibility%20Application%20Woodlawn%20Innov%20%20%202-5-14.pdf#search=woodlawn%20innovation%20zone

[29] http://alex.state.al.us/ccrs/sites/alex.state.al.us.ccrs/files/Flexibility Waiver.docx.

[30] Act 2015-3, Section 6, Subdivision (a)(3). Section 6, Subdivision (a)(5) further provides that the number of conversions is unlimited.

[31] Act 2015-3, Section 7.

[32] Act 2015-3, Section 4, Subdivisions (10) and (16) spell out the requirements for the board.

[33] Act 2015-3, Section 9, Subdivision (a)(4).

[34] Act 2015-3, Section 4, Subdivision (16).

[35] Act 2015-3, Section 9, Subdivision (3). The exceptions include civil rights, health, and safety requirements, and responsibility for special education services to students with disabilities.

[36] Act 2015-3, Section 9, Subdivision (6).

[37] Act 2015-3, Sections 7 and 8.

[38] Act 2015-3, Section 6, Subdivision (h).

[39] Act 2015-3, Section 8.

[40] Act 2015-3, Section 9, Subdivision (d)(2).

[41] Act 2015-3, Section 5, Subdivision (a) (5), (6) and (7).

[42] Act 2015-3, Section 6, Subdivisions (j) and (k).

[43] Act 2015-3, Section 10.

[44] Code of Alabama, Section 16-8-8. *The general administration and supervision of the public schools of the educational interests of each county, with the exception of cities having a city board of education, shall be vested in the county board of education….*

[45] Code of Alabama, Section 16-13-199. *When a municipality under the jurisdiction of a county board of education attains a population of 5,000 or more, according to the last decennial or any subsequent federal census, the schools of the municipality may remain under control of the county board by agreement between that board and the city council of the municipality, which agreement shall be expressed in resolutions adopted by and spread upon the minutes of the two authorities. If the municipality does not enter into such an agreement, the control of the school or schools of the territory within the municipality shall be vested in a city board of education, and thereafter the district school tax collected in the city shall be paid over to the custodian of city school funds, and the district school tax collected in the contiguous territory shall be paid over to the custodian of county school funds; provided, that so much of the proceeds of the special school tax collected in the original school tax district as may be required for the retirement of outstanding warrants issued against such tax, including the interest thereon, shall be paid over to the proper official or authority to be used for such purpose.*