

SREB

Alabama

A Decade of Progress

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

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2012 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
CHALLENGE TO LEAD GOALS FOR EDUCATION



This state progress report on the SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education is available as a printable document at www.sreb.org. The lead figures on each page also are available as PowerPoint slides on the site.

It is designed for state policy-makers and education leaders to use as a ready reference and to select individual pages and topics for custom presentations and handouts.

This report was developed by a team of SREB staff members led by Crystal Collins, policy analyst, Education Policies; and Jeff Gagne, director, Education Policies. Key team members included Jenny Hite, research associate; Michaela Corrente, policy analyst; Joan M. Lord, vice president, Education Policies; and Gene Bottoms, senior vice president.

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It is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Jeff Gagne. A full listing of the goals is printed on the inside back cover. For more information, e-mail jeff.gagne@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211. Goals for Education: *Challenge to Lead* is available at www.sreb.org.

The President of SREB reviews a decade of progress

SREB states adopted the *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education a decade ago — in 2002. Since then, the region has seen growth in public school enrollment that outstripped growth in the nation. It also has seen increases in racial and ethnic diversity in schools and in the proportion of students in poverty and from low-income families. It closes the decade with four years of tough economic struggles.

Yet the region has pushed ahead with purpose.

This fifth biennial report marks 10 years of significant improvement on many key education measures. As SREB states prepare to launch SREB's *Challenge to Lead 2020* for the future, it is appropriate to pause and recount these gains:

- Most SREB states expanded **public pre-K** sufficiently to serve all children in poverty — *a major improvement since 2004*.
- Although scores are not yet where they need to be, fourth- and eighth-grade **reading and mathematics** achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) increased in the region. Most SREB states **outpaced the nation** in gains on NAEP.
- Troubling **achievement gaps** narrowed between racial and ethnic groups and for students from low-income families. Black fourth- and eighth-graders narrowed gaps with white students in math more than their peers in the nation.
- Most SREB states adopted **end-course exams** to replace all or part of comprehensive exams as high school graduation requirements or school accountability measures.
- **High school graduation** rate increases in most SREB states surpassed the nation's gains, and the region *narrowed the gap with the nation to 1 point* for the first time since the nation started a comparable calculation for all 50 states.
- All SREB states increased the percentage of recent high school graduates **entering college** — nine by double digits — and the region matched the 11-point U.S. gain. **Graduation rates** at public four-year institutions rose in every SREB state.

This report details where **Alabama** stands in education and suggests future priorities. You and your state can take pride in these highlights of your progress:

- Alabama's statewide **public pre-K** program was one of only five in the nation to meet all 10 nationally recognized standards of quality.
- Alabama **led the nation** in fourth-grade reading improvement on NAEP at the Basic level from 2003 to 2011.
- Alabama's black and Hispanic fourth-graders narrowed **achievement gaps** with white students in math on NAEP at the Basic level — and its black fourth-graders did so in reading. Alabama's black eighth-graders narrowed the achievement gap in math at the NAEP Basic level.

This fifth biennial report marks a decade of solid progress for SREB states.



The President of SREB *(continued)*

- Alabama increased its “**promoting power**” — the percentage of students who moved successfully from ninth to 12th grade.
- The increase in Alabama’s **high school graduation** rate outpaced the region and the nation.
- Alabama’s recent high school graduates **enrolled in college** at a higher rate than their U.S. peers.
- Alabama’s “**first-year persistence rate**,” the percentage of college freshmen who return for a second year, exceeded the region.
- Alabama’s average beginning **teacher salary** exceeded those in its neighboring states, the region and the nation, making it competitive in the marketplace.

Still, many challenges lie ahead in the region. That is why SREB and state education leaders have worked over the last decade to craft a new generation of policies to guide states, and many updates have been made to fit the changing times.

SREB is committed to helping states meet these goals by tracking progress and recommending next steps, and our efforts will continue. We call for all state leaders to continue their commitment, too, and to make education progress a top priority.



Dave Spence

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Foreword

Policy-makers and education leaders in SREB states have been working since 2002 to meet all 12 *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education. At the same time, SREB states have had to struggle with the toughest economic challenges in decades. Even so, SREB states have succeeded in achieving many of the goals — and gaining ground on others.

The SREB Commission on the goals specified indicators of progress for each of them. This report tells a story of progress on these indicators in your state to help you make better public education policy decisions.

The story is built around four themes that guided SREB state leaders when they developed the goals in 2002:

- **helping ensure students are ready to move from one level of education to another;**
- **raising achievement and closing gaps** for different racial, ethnic and gender groups and for those from low-income families — beginning with gains for all students and then promoting accelerated growth for students from groups that are behind in achievement;
- **preparing more students for college and career training**, including stronger high school graduation rates and the creation of college-readiness standards; and
- **improving college completion**, including higher college graduation rates and more postsecondary certificates and degrees.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals also addressed the broader issues of school leadership, teacher quality, and school and college accountability. These are difficult issues that **require various education agencies within states to work together**. That is why the goals called on states to develop an education system — from prekindergarten through higher education — that is accountable.

This report provides analysis and recommendations that you can use to improve education policies and practices



in your state for all students — from the youngest child to older adults returning to school. The information presented is labeled to reflect the associated *Challenge to Lead* goal.

The beginning pages profile state demographic trends including school enrollment, income disparities, and racial and ethnic diversity. Knowing how your state has changed demographically puts in perspective why key goals are important and why some students made progress — and others fell behind — on certain performance measures. Subsequent pages report your state progress on these measures.

In most cases, state information is presented in the context of national and regional information over a period of years. The commentary examines what has happened since the *Challenge to Lead* goals were adopted. The figures help you know if your state was a national or regional pacesetter — or if it needs to step up the pace in the years ahead.

For more than 50 years, SREB states have found it important to know where they stand to ensure that their students can measure up to their peers across the nation and the region. This report provides that essential update.

For more information on the goals, visit www.sreb.org.

State Profile — Demographics

The overall population in SREB states grew 17 percent from 1999 to 2009, so it is no surprise that public elementary and secondary school enrollment also grew. Fall enrollment increased 11 percent in SREB states — slower than population growth but faster than the 5 percent increase in enrollment nationally.

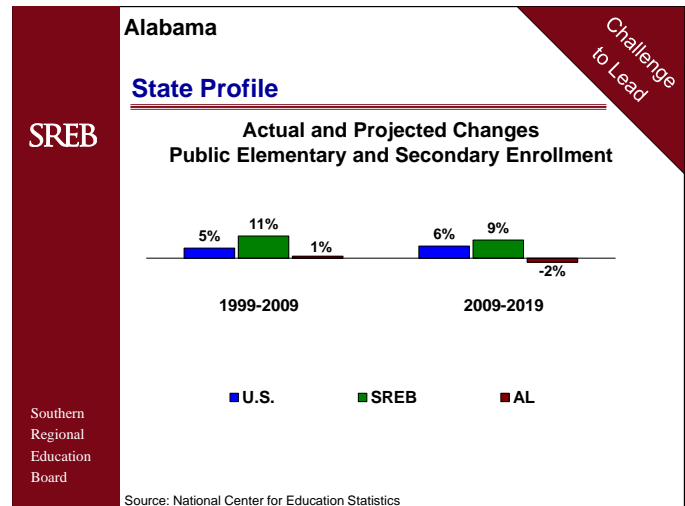
Thirteen SREB states had higher enrollment in 2009 than in 1999, and three SREB states had declines. The changes ranged from an increase of 22 percent to a decrease of 9 percent.

Looking ahead, national public school enrollment is projected to increase at a faster rate from 2009 to 2019 than it did from 1999 to 2009. However, the enrollment rate in SREB states will slow. Five SREB states are projected to decline in enrollment through 2019.

Since the *Challenge to Lead* goals were launched, public school enrollment grew much more diverse. This change was evident in public high school graduating classes. In spring 2010, 62 percent of graduating seniors in the United States were white, down 8 percentage points from 2000. According to projections, that proportion is expected to continue declining to 54 percent by 2020.

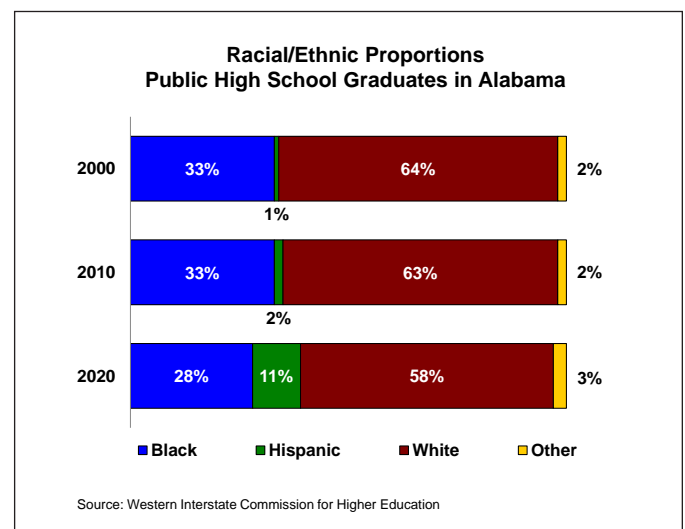
Likewise, the proportion of graduating seniors who are black is projected to decline 2 percentage points from 2010 to 2020. The proportion of Hispanic graduating seniors in the United States is expected to grow from 11 percent to 24 percent from 2000 to 2020.

All but one SREB state will mirror the nation by growing more diverse over the decade. The fastest-growing group — Hispanic students — will increase 17 percentage points in the region during this time. Traditionally, Hispanic students have been disadvantaged educationally and economically. SREB states will need to ensure these students — many from low-income households and with limited English proficiency — receive the support they need to graduate from high school.



In Alabama:

- Public school enrollment increased from 1999 to 2009, but it is expected to decrease from 2009 to 2019. About 749,000 students were enrolled in 2009.
- The proportions of black and white students in the Class of 2020 are expected to decline, and the proportion of Hispanic students will grow.



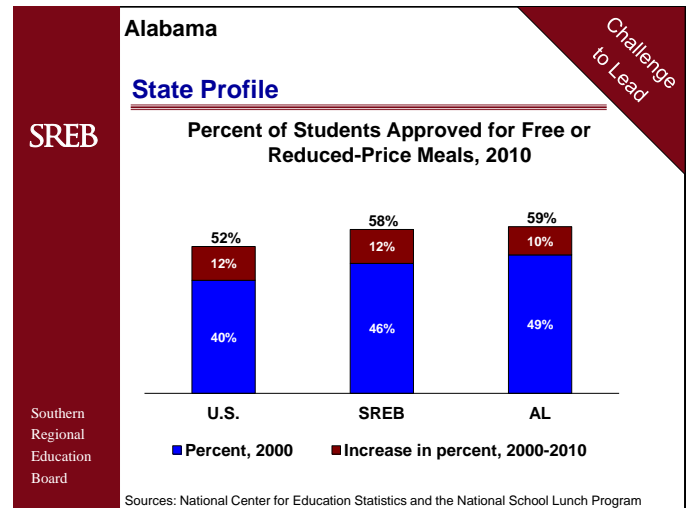
State Profile — Household Income

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for *all* students to achieve at high levels, including students from poor and low-income families. In 2010, about 16 million children under 18 years old in the United States lived in *poverty*—about 22 percent of U.S. children. The U.S. Census Bureau measures poverty by income and household size. In 2010, the poverty level was about \$22,000 in annual income for a household of four.

More than 40 percent of the nation’s children living in poverty were in SREB states. In half of these states, the percentage was 26 percent or higher. These percentages ranged from 13 percent to 33 percent of all children. The percentages in the nation and in the SREB median states increased from 2000 to 2010; the percentage also rose in most SREB states. (Percentages for the SREB median states are the average of the two middle SREB states.)

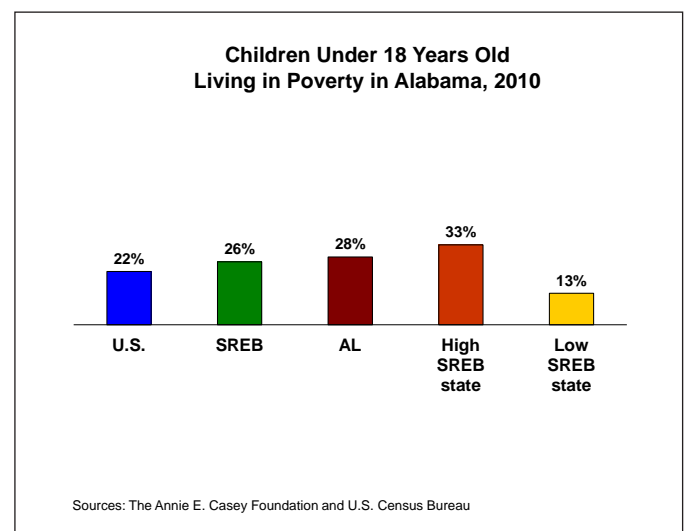
The percentage of students in *low-income* households in the nation rose from 40 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2010. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* defines low income by eligibility for free or reduced-price meals in the National School Lunch Program — available to students from households of four with incomes up to 185 percent of the annual poverty level (up to \$40,793 in 2010). In the region, the percentage grew from 46 percent to 58 percent. The percentage rose in every SREB state.

The growth in students from low-income households is important for policy-makers. *No Child Left Behind* requires that states report the progress of these students in meeting state standards. As a result, students from low-income households figure prominently in schools’ efforts to make progress under the federal law.



In Alabama:

- From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of students living in low-income households rose 10 points.
- In 2010, the state poverty rate among children was 6 points higher than the U.S. rate and 2 points higher than the rate for the SREB median states.
- The percentage of children living in poverty increased 7 points since 2000.



First-Grade Readiness in SREB States

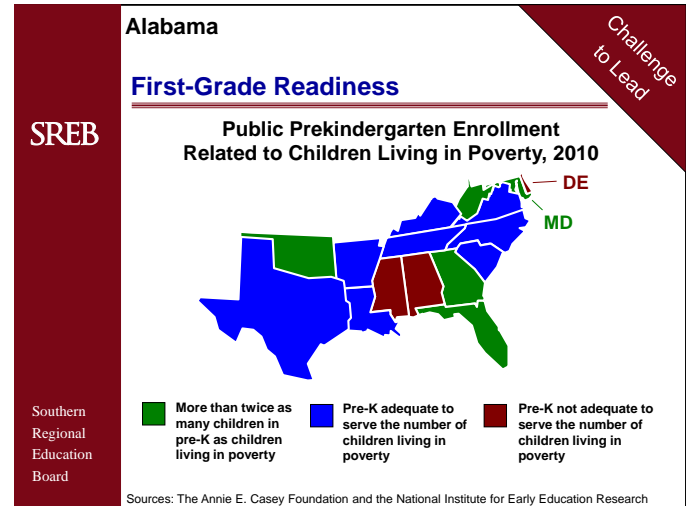
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to serve children at risk of not being ready for school. Each state's commitment to school readiness can be measured by whether it provides access to prekindergarten programs for its neediest children and whether its programs meet national standards of quality. Research shows that only high-quality programs make a difference in school readiness for these children.

One measure of providing access for the neediest children is having space in publicly funded prekindergarten programs — both state-funded prekindergarten (including programs for children with disabilities) and federally funded Head Start — at least equal to the number of 4-year-olds living in poverty in the state. SREB states are leaders in providing this level of access in prekindergarten.

This is an improvement from 2004, when eight SREB states did not have pre-K enrollment equal to the number of children living in poverty in those states. By fall 2010, five SREB states had fall 2010 enrollment of at least twice the number of children living in poverty. Eight other SREB states had prekindergarten enrollment higher than the number of children living in poverty. Even so, from 2008 all SREB states declined in percentages of children in poverty having access to prekindergarten.

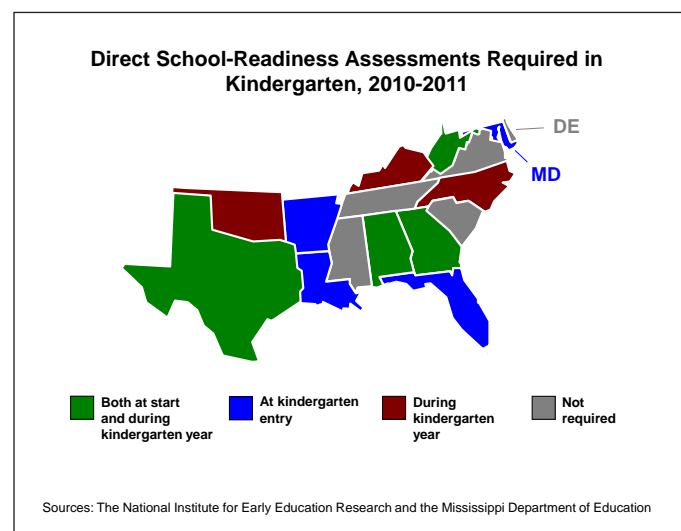
The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified 10 standards of quality that are widely accepted for prekindergarten programs. SREB states are national leaders in implementing these standards. Among the criteria are curriculum, class-size limits, child-to-staff ratios and staff qualifications. Only five states in the nation have met all 10 standards, three of which are SREB states. Six SREB states are among 11 states nationwide that have met nine of the 10 standards.

As state-funded pre-K programs expanded across the region, more states developed important school-readiness assessments. The earlier these are administered, the earlier they can inform program providers about how to help children develop and learn. Multiple measures and observations lead to better information.



In Alabama:

- In 2010, enrollment in publicly funded prekindergarten programs was an estimated 65 percent of 4-year-olds living in poverty, down from 89 percent in 2008.
- NIEER reported that Alabama met all 10 standards of quality for pre-K in 2010.
- The state required DIBELS in kindergarten to assess school readiness.



Early Grades Achievement in SREB States

Known as the Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a series of exams that measure student achievement in specific subjects and grades.

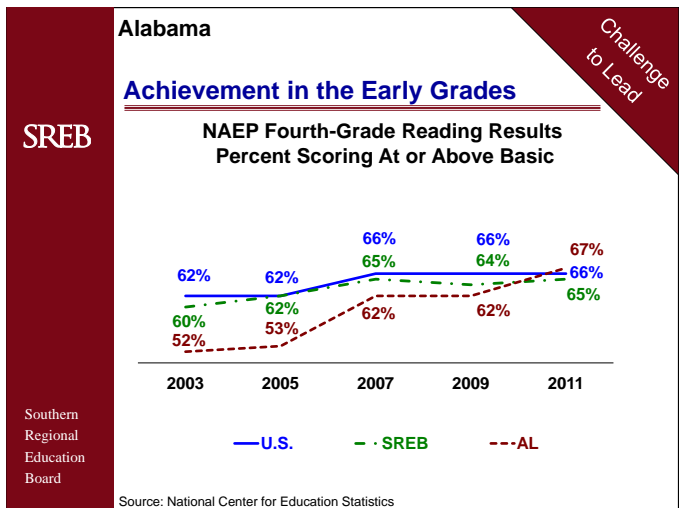
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for all fourth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, defined as "partial mastery of knowledge and skills."

The percentages of fourth-graders in the nation and region scoring at or above the Basic level in reading improved since 2003 but appear to have stalled since 2007. Every SREB state but one increased the percentage of students scoring at or above the Basic level from 2003 to 2011.

While calling for *all* students to improve, the goals also challenged SREB states to close achievement gaps for students from various racial and ethnic groups and for those from low-income families.

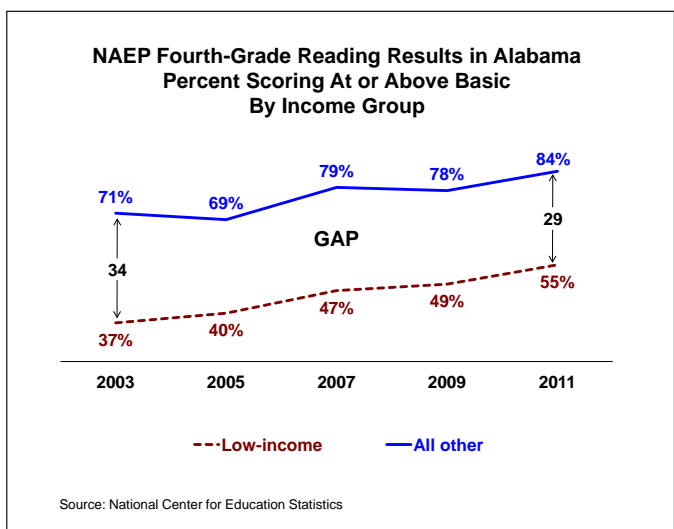
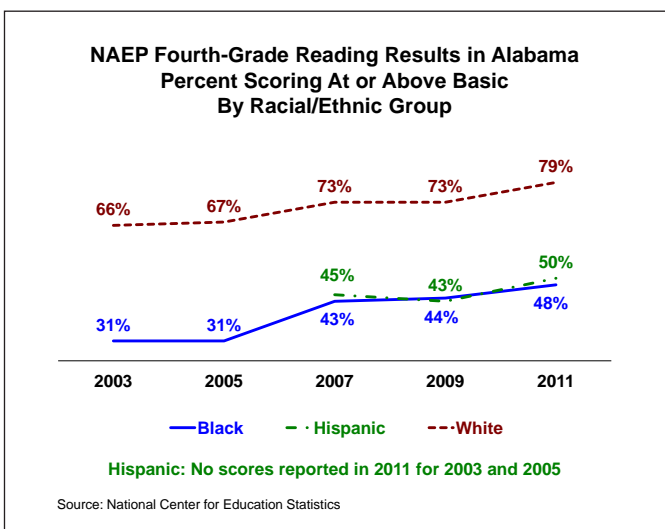
White students continued to outperform their black and Hispanic peers in the SREB median states, but black students have narrowed the gap by 3 percentage points since 2003. Achievement gains by Hispanic students have not kept pace with those of their white peers, however, and gaps between these groups have widened.

Fourth-graders from low-income families in the region continued to outpace their national peers in reading. Gaps between students from low-income families and all others remain wide.



In Alabama:

- The percentage of fourth-graders who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading increased 15 points since 2003.
- The gap between black and white students narrowed by 4 points since 2003 — to 31 points in 2011. The gap for Hispanic students widened to 29 points since 2007.
- The gap between students from low-income families and all other students narrowed by 5 points since 2003.



Early Grades Achievement in SREB States

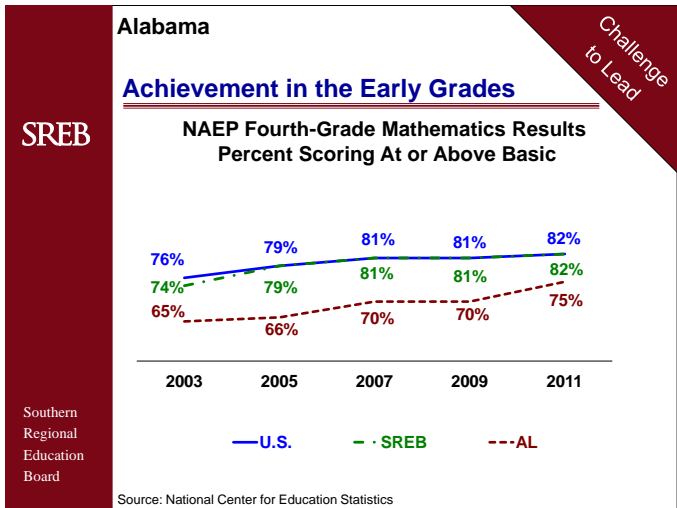
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for all fourth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.”

The percentages of fourth-graders in the nation and region scoring at or above the Basic level in math improved since 2003. Students in SREB states have equaled their national peers each year since 2005. Additionally, every SREB state but one increased the percentage scoring at or above the Basic level from 2003 to 2011.

While calling for *all* students to improve, the goals also challenged SREB states to close achievement gaps for students from various racial and ethnic groups and for those from low-income families.

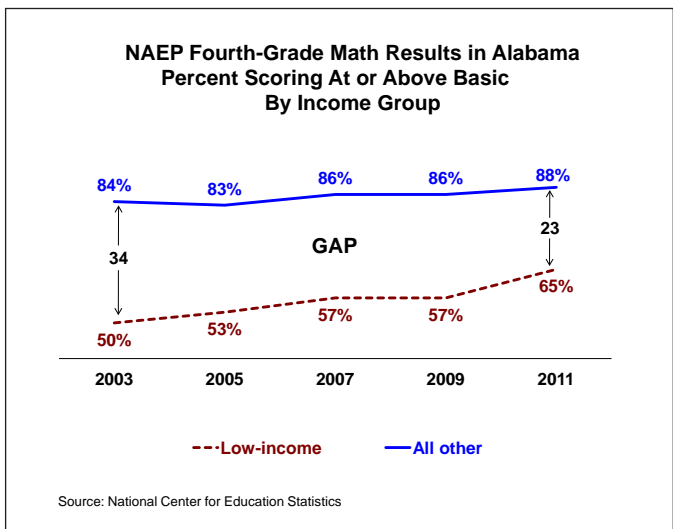
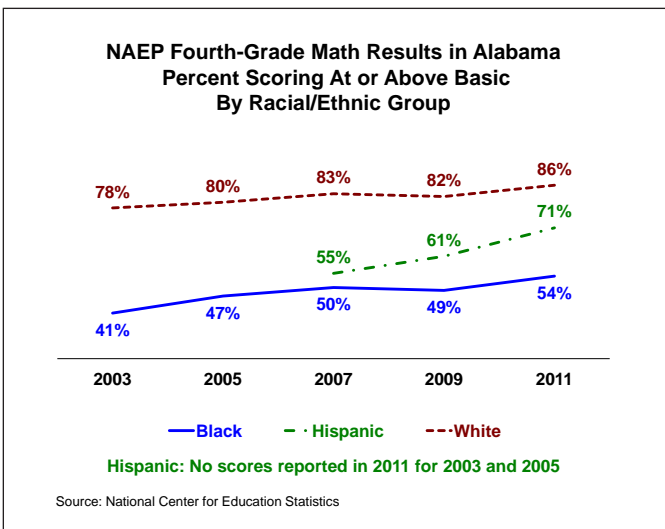
White students continued to outperform their black and Hispanic peers in the SREB median states, but black and Hispanic students have made progress in closing the gap in math since 2003. The gap between black fourth-graders and their white peers narrowed by 12 points; the gap between Hispanic and white students narrowed by 4 points.

Fourth-graders from low-income families in the region continued to outpace their national peers in math. However, gaps between students from low-income families and all others remain. The region narrowed the gap by 5 points; the nation narrowed the gap by 7 points since 2003.



In Alabama:

- The percentage of fourth-graders who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math increased 10 points since 2003.
- The gap between black and white students narrowed by 5 points since 2003 — to 32 points in 2011. The gap for Hispanic students narrowed to 15 points since 2007.
- The gap between students from low-income families and all other students narrowed by 11 points since 2003.



School Performance Standards in SREB States

State academic standards are fundamental to public elementary and secondary education. SREB states were leaders in increasing the rigor in their state standards over the last 10 years.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to get their standards “right” in reading and mathematics, as well as other subjects. All states have established academic standards that serve as a guide for the development of curriculum. The standards identify the knowledge and skills in specific subjects that students should master at each grade level.

But developing these initial standards was only part of the job. States then developed tests and established cut scores to measure whether students met the standards.

If similar or higher percentages of students met a state’s standards as scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading or math, the standards likely were **too low**. SREB considered results **similar** if they were within 5 points of each other. If results on state standards were closer to the NAEP Proficient level than the Basic level, state education officials can be confident that their standards are set **about right**.

In 2011, three SREB states had fourth-grade reading standards that appeared about right compared with NAEP results, and 13 had reading standards that appeared low. For the same year, eight SREB states had fourth-grade math standards that appeared about right compared with NAEP results, and eight had math standards that appeared low.

If state standards are too low, they do not challenge students sufficiently. They leave too many students unprepared for the next grade level and for high school and beyond.

Many SREB states have revised their standards, assessments or cut scores to measure student achievement better. As part of a push to implement more rigorous, college- and career-ready standards, every SREB state adopted either the Common Core State Standards or other rigorous standards since the *Challenge to Lead* goals began.

Challenge to Lead

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School Performance Standards

Percent At or Above Standards Fourth-Grade Reading 2011

	<u>AL State Standards</u>	NAEP			
		Basic		Proficient	
		AL	U.S.	AL	U.S.
2009	87%	62%	66%	28%	32%
2011	88%	67%	66%	31%	32%

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Sources: Alabama State Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics

In Alabama:

- The percentage of fourth-graders who met state standards in reading was higher than those scoring at or above the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels in 2011.
- The percentage who met state standards in math also was higher than those scoring at or above the Basic and Proficient levels in the same year.
- This means the state standards for fourth-grade reading and math appeared low.

Percent At or Above Standards in Alabama Fourth-Grade Mathematics 2011

	<u>AL State Standards</u>	NAEP			
		Basic		Proficient	
		AL	U.S.	AL	U.S.
2009	79%	70%	81%	24%	38%
2011	82%	75%	82%	27%	40%

Sources: Alabama State Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics

Middle Grades Achievement in SREB States

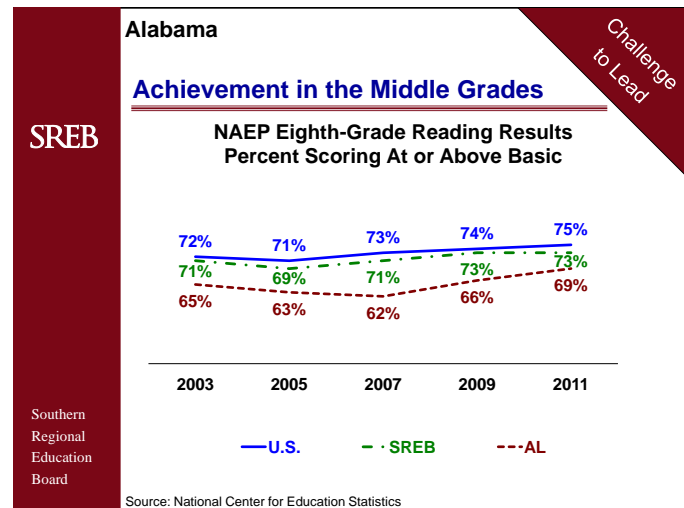
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for all eighth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.”

The percentages of eighth-graders in the nation and region scoring at or above the Basic level in reading improved modestly since 2003. However, the region continues to trail the nation in achievement. Eleven SREB states increased the percentage scoring at or above the Basic level in reading from 2003 to 2011.

While calling for *all* students to improve, the goals also challenged SREB states to close achievement gaps for students from various racial and ethnic groups and for those from low-income families.

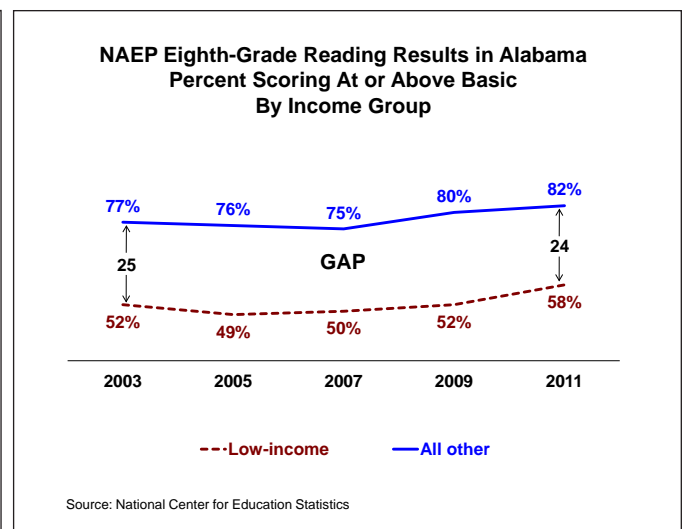
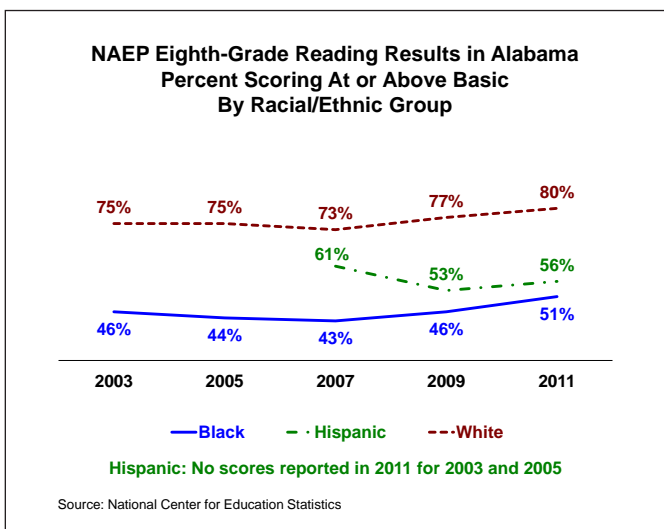
White students continued to outperform their black and Hispanic peers in the SREB median states, but black and Hispanic students have made progress in closing the gap in reading since 2003. The gap between black eighth-graders and their white peers narrowed by 2 points; the gap between Hispanic and white students narrowed by 6 points.

Eighth-graders from low-income families in the region mirrored their national peers in reading in 2011. Although gaps between students from low-income families and all others remain, they have narrowed since 2003: by 4 points in the nation and 3 points in the region.



In Alabama:

- The percentage of eighth-graders who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading increased 4 points since 2003.
- The gap between black and white students remained the same since 2003 — 29 points. The gap for Hispanic students widened to 24 points since 2007.
- The gap between students from low-income families and all other students narrowed by 1 point since 2003.



Middle Grades Achievement in SREB States

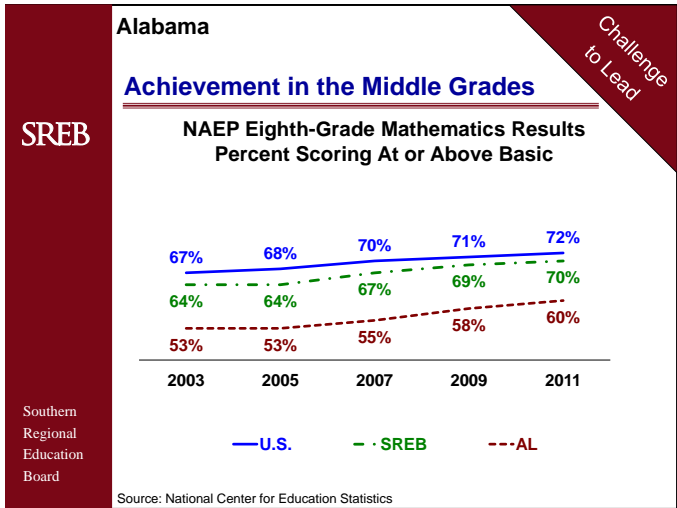
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for all eighth-graders to score at or above the NAEP Basic level in mathematics, defined as “partial mastery of knowledge and skills.”

The percentages of eighth-graders in the nation and region scoring at or above the Basic level in math improved since 2003. Additionally, every SREB state increased the percentage scoring at or above the Basic level over the period. However, students in SREB states continued to trail their national peers.

While calling for *all* students to improve, the goals also challenged SREB states to close achievement gaps for students from various racial and ethnic groups and for those from low-income families.

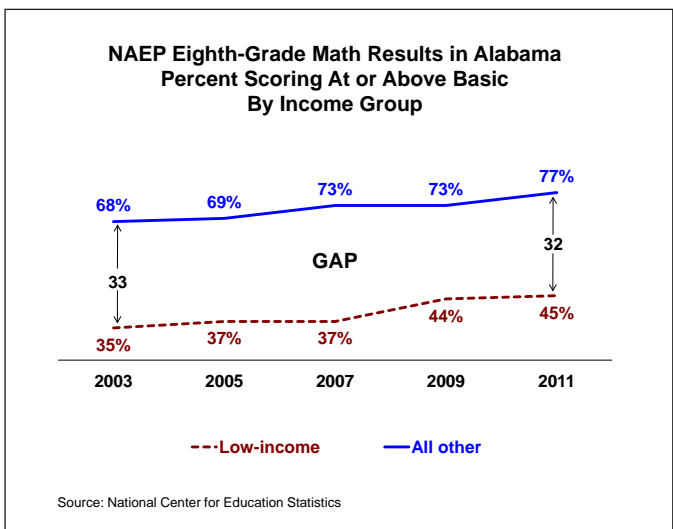
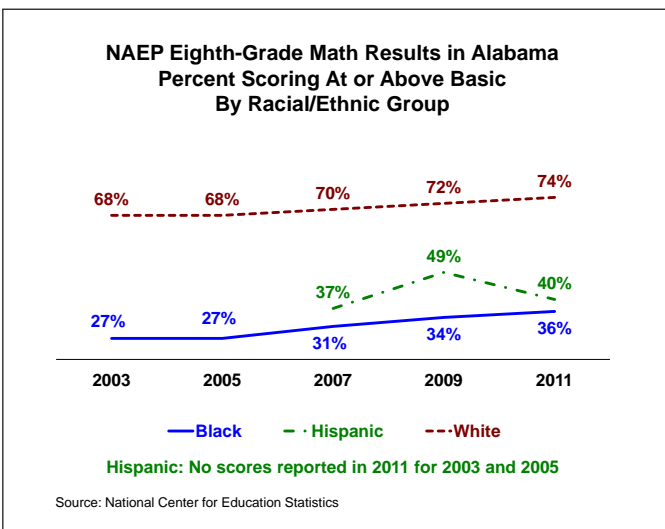
White students continued to outperform their black and Hispanic peers in the SREB median states, but black and Hispanic students have made progress in closing the gap since 2003. The gap between black eighth-graders and their white peers narrowed by 8 points; the gap between Hispanic and white students narrowed by 11 points.

Eighth-graders from low-income families in the region continued to trail their national peers in math over much of the period. Although gaps between students from low-income families and all others remain, they have narrowed since 2003: by 6 points in the nation and 3 points in the region.



In Alabama:

- The percentage of eighth-graders who scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in math increased 7 points since 2003.
- The gap between black and white students narrowed by 3 points since 2003 — to 38 points in 2011. The gap for Hispanic students widened to 34 points since 2007.
- The gap between students from low-income families and all other students narrowed by 1 point since 2003.



School Performance Standards in SREB States

State academic standards are fundamental to public elementary and secondary education. SREB states were leaders in increasing the rigor in their state standards over the last 10 years.

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to get their standards “right” in reading and mathematics, as well as other subjects. All states have established academic standards that serve as a guide for the development of curriculum. The standards identify the knowledge and skills in specific subjects that students should master at each grade level.

But developing these initial standards was only part of the job. States then developed tests and established cut scores to measure whether students met the standards.

If similar or higher percentages of students met a state’s standards as scored at or above the NAEP Basic level in reading or math, the standards likely were **too low**. SREB considered results **similar** if they were within 5 points of each other. If results on state standards were closer to the NAEP Proficient level than the Basic level, state education officials can be confident that their standards are set **about right**.

In 2011, seven SREB states had eighth-grade **reading** standards that appeared about right compared with NAEP results, and nine had **reading** standards that appeared low. For the same year, six SREB states had eighth-grade **math** standards that appeared about right compared with NAEP results, and 10 had **math** standards that appeared low.

If state standards are too low, they do not challenge students sufficiently. They leave too many students unprepared for the next grade level and for high school and beyond.

Many SREB states have revised their standards, assessments or cut scores to measure student achievement better. As part of a push to implement more rigorous, college- and career-ready standards, every SREB state adopted either the Common Core State Standards or other rigorous standards since the *Challenge to Lead* goals began.

Challenge to Lead

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School Performance Standards

Percent At or Above Standards Eighth-Grade Mathematics 2011

	<u>AL State Standards</u>	NAEP			
		Basic		Proficient	
		AL	U.S.	AL	U.S.
2009	74%	58%	71%	20%	33%
2011	77%	60%	72%	20%	34%

Southern Regional Education Board

Sources: Alabama State Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics

In Alabama:

- The percentage of eighth-graders who met state standards in math was higher than those scoring at or above the NAEP Basic and Proficient levels in 2011.
- The percentage who met state standards in reading also was higher than those scoring at or above the Basic and Proficient levels in the same year.
- This means the state standards for eighth-grade math and reading appeared low.

Percent At or Above Standards in Alabama Eighth-Grade Reading 2011

	<u>AL State Standards</u>	NAEP			
		Basic		Proficient	
		AL	U.S.	AL	U.S.
2009	75%	66%	74%	24%	30%
2011	77%	69%	75%	26%	32%

Sources: Alabama State Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics

High School Graduation in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to exceed the national percentage of all groups of students graduating from high school each year.

The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) in the SREB median states in 2009 trailed the U.S. rate by 1 percentage point, the smallest gap for all the years the rate was calculated, back to the 1990s. The region narrowed this gap by almost doubling the graduation rate growth over the decade — 8 percentage points compared with 5 points in the nation.

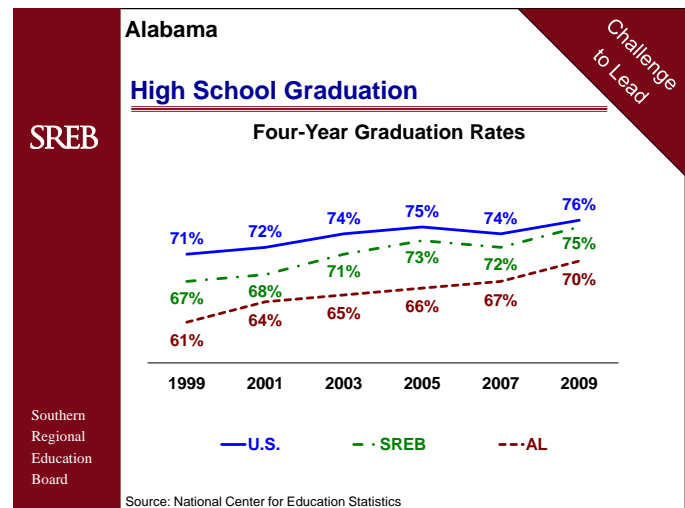
Ten SREB states saw their graduation rate increases outpace the nation's from 1999 to 2009. As a result, graduation rates in six SREB states exceeded the national rate, and two more states were within 1 point of exceeding it.

Black and Hispanic students in SREB states made progress compared with their peers nationwide. In 2009, graduation rates for both black and Hispanic students in the region exceeded national rates. This growth over the decade outpaced national growth by 2 percentage points each for black and Hispanic students.

Both groups, however, still trailed their white counterparts by wide margins, although with smaller gaps than their national peers. In 1999, the graduation rate gaps between white and black students were 17 percentage points in the region and 23 in the nation. The gaps shrank over the decade to 13 points in the region and 18 in the nation, and they remained stubbornly large.

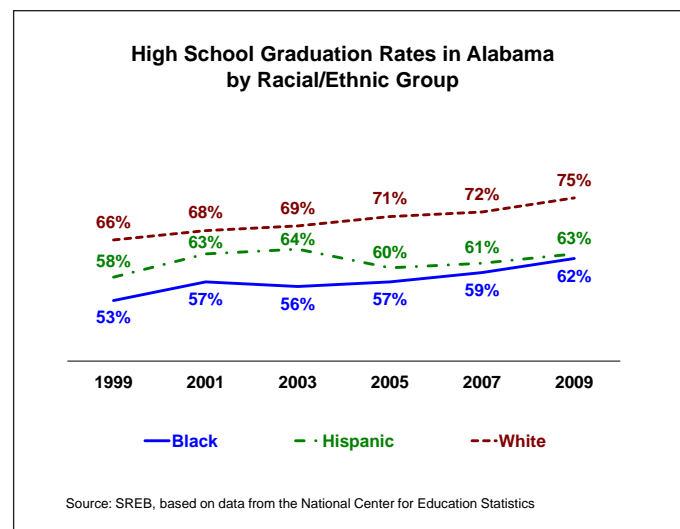
Hispanic students in the region maintained smaller graduation rate gaps than their national counterparts, but this gap grew slightly over the decade, from 8 percentage points to 9 points. This gap, however, was about the half the size of the national gap between white and Hispanic students, which remained flat — 16 percentage points — over the decade.

SREB states can improve their high school graduation rates by raising the bar for *all groups* of students. This is especially true for black and Hispanic students, who trailed their white counterparts over the decade.



In Alabama:

- The high school graduation rate increased 9 percentage points from 1999 to 2009, narrowing the state's gap with the nation and the region.
- The graduation rates for black, white and Hispanic students improved from 1999 to 2009. The gap between black and white students narrowed slightly. The gap between Hispanic and white students widened by 4 points.



High School Progression in SREB States

More students are retained in ninth grade than in any other grade. In the nation, schools enrolled 11 percent more ninth-graders in 2010 than eighth-graders in 2009. In the SREB states, 13 percent more ninth-graders enrolled in 2010 than eighth-graders in 2009.

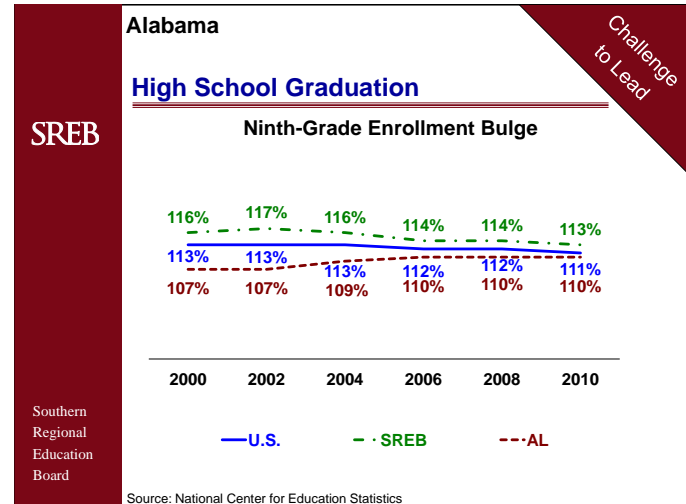
From 2000 to 2010, this so-called “ninth-grade enrollment bulge” decreased across the nation by 2 percentage points and in SREB states by 3 points. Eight SREB states saw their ninth-grade enrollment bulge decrease over the decade. In 2010, the bulge in SREB states ranged from 6 points to 18 points.

It is important to decrease the ninth-grade enrollment bulge if states are to increase their high school graduation rates. Some SREB state leaders who analyzed the reason for their ninth-grade bulge determined that the underlying causes for failures were complex. In more than one state, they traced the source to inadequate preparation in reading and math in the early grades.

While failure is most prevalent in the ninth grade, it is not the only year in high school for concern. States also need to increase the percentage of students who move successfully from ninth to 12th grade in three years.

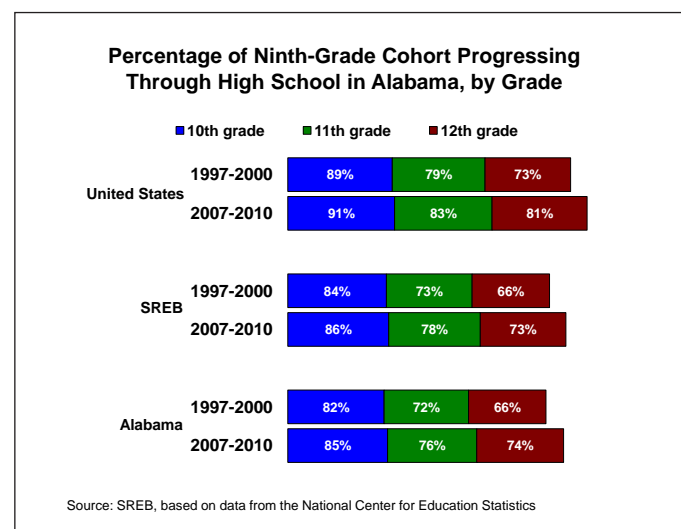
Education leaders in SREB states can measure this progression — known as grade-level “promoting power.” By doing so, they can pinpoint in which grades students are struggling. In those SREB states where the percentage of students moving from ninth grade to 12th grade on time increased over the decade, the high school graduation rate also increased.

Once students make it to their senior year of high school, they still need to complete their final requirements for a diploma and chart a path toward college and careers. However, many students disengage from school during the 12th grade. Nationally, 89 percent of students who began the school year as seniors in fall 2007 graduated in spring 2008. Seniors in SREB states fared slightly better: 90 percent of students who began the year as seniors in 2007 graduated in spring 2008.



In Alabama:

- The ninth-grade enrollment bulge did not decrease from 2000 to 2010. It grew 3 percentage points to 110 percent by 2010.
- Alabama’s ninth- to 12th-grade promoting power improved from 66 percent in 2000 to 74 percent in 2010.



College and Career Readiness in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to provide students with solid academic preparation for success beyond high school graduation. SREB states have used high school exams for many years to measure student progress on state standards toward achieving this goal.

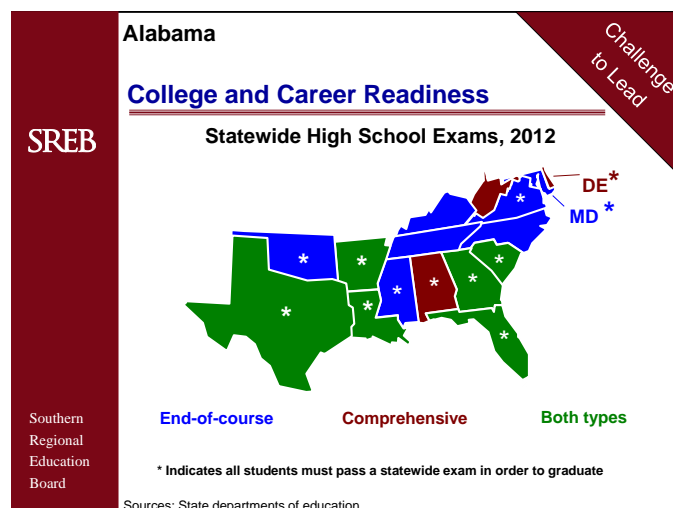
As SREB states raised academic standards after 2002, they designed and implemented a new generation of high school exams to align to the new standards and tie assessment results to state and federal school accountability measures.

In 2002, 12 SREB states administered statewide comprehensive exams only, two used end-of-course exams and one state used both. One state did not administer any statewide high school exams. Usually given in 10th or 11th grade, statewide **comprehensive exams** assess whether students have met minimum academic standards based on content learned over a number of years.

Since then, 13 SREB states implemented statewide **end-of-course exams**, generally considered a better measure of student performance, because they assess knowledge and skills at the conclusion of a particular course. End-of-course exams in subjects such as Algebra II and English III may have greater potential to measure students' readiness for college than comprehensive exams.

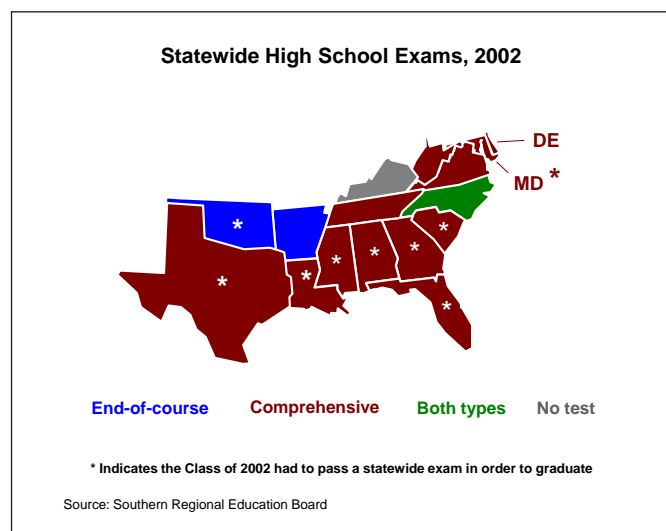
In 2012, 12 SREB states tie their student exam results to earning a regular high school diploma, making these exams high-stakes. Several states also use the results of end-of-course exams to calculate a percentage of students' final grades for the course in which they were assessed. In four SREB states, students' scores on statewide exams do not affect their ability to graduate.

The changes to high school exams over the past decade attest to the continuing evolution of statewide assessments. In 2012, six SREB states require both end-of-course and statewide comprehensive exams for graduation, but now they are phasing out their comprehensive exams.



In Alabama:

- The Alabama High School Graduation Exam assesses students in language arts, reading, math, science and social studies.
- Passing this comprehensive exam is required to graduate from high school.



College and Career Readiness in SREB States

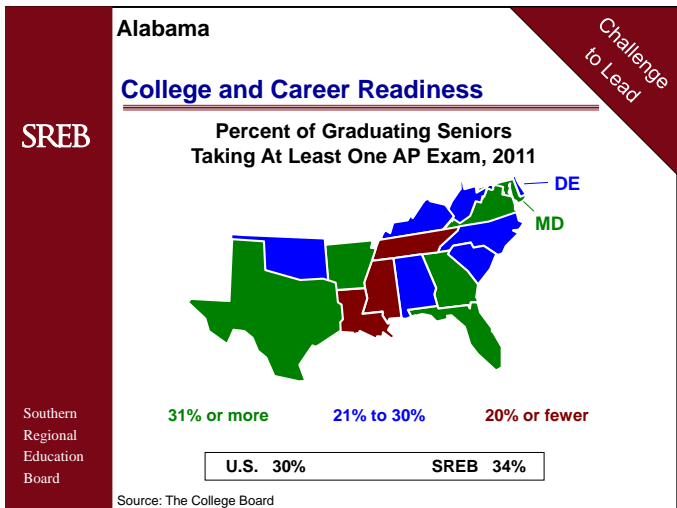
The *Challenge to Lead* goals recognized that having high school students participate in the Advanced Placement (AP) program was a good way for them to prepare for college and careers. Research shows that students who take AP courses and attempt the related exams are more successful academically as college freshmen — even if they do not pass the exams.

The goals called for graduating seniors in SREB states to *take* AP exams while in high school at rates higher than the national rate. Since 2004, nine SREB states have led the nation in the percentage of graduating seniors who took at least one AP exam while in high school. Six currently do.

The goals also called for graduating seniors in SREB states to *pass* AP exams at rates higher than national rates. A score of 3 or higher is considered “passing” because most colleges award credit toward freshman course requirements to students who achieve this score. Although the region as a whole has not exceeded the national rate, it has equaled it every year since 2006. Six SREB states met this goal over the decade; four currently do.

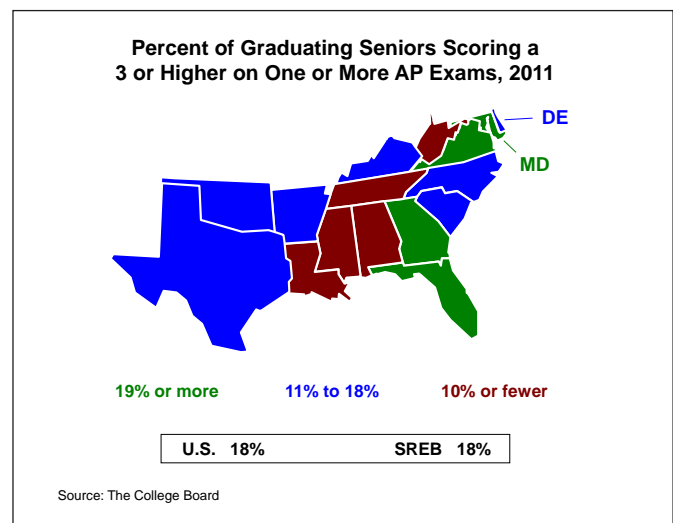
In addition, many SREB states — together with the College Board — promoted greater equity of access in the AP program for black and Hispanic students. These efforts resulted in higher participation and passing rates for both groups. The College Board considers states to have reached “equity” when the proportion of black or Hispanic seniors who are successful on AP exams equals or exceeds their proportion in the overall graduating class in each state.

SREB states lead the nation in participation and passing rates for both black and Hispanic seniors in AP courses. In 2011, 12 states had closed the equity gap for Hispanic students. No state in the region — or in the nation — had closed the gap for black students.



In Alabama:

- In 2011, 22 percent of graduating seniors had taken at least one AP exam in high school, up 14 percentage points from 2001.
- Over the decade, the percent who passed at least one AP exam grew 6 points, to 10 percent in 2011.
- The equity gap closed for Hispanic seniors and narrowed for black seniors since 2001.



College and Career Readiness in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals identified students' performance on college admission tests as an indicator of readiness for college and careers. In half of the SREB states, the ACT is the dominant test. The number of students taking the ACT in the nation grew 52 percent — from about 1.1 million students in 2001 to about 1.6 million in 2011. The number in the region grew even faster — from roughly 396,000 to 618,000 students, or 56 percent — over the same period.

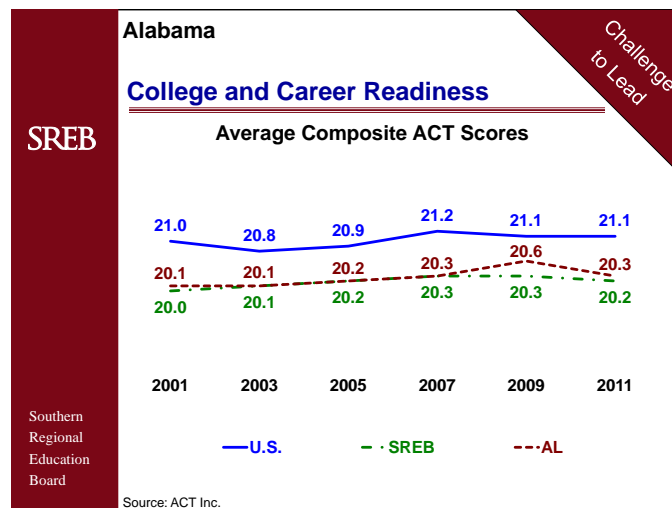
The U.S. average composite ACT score, which reflects results in English, mathematics, reading and science, rose from 21.0 in 2001 to 21.1 in 2011. Each one-tenth of a point (0.1) is considered significant on the ACT.

Closing achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups has been a central theme of the *Challenge to Lead* goals. Gaps narrow when scores for black and Hispanic students improve and outpace gains of white students. Score gaps narrowed between black and white students and between Hispanic and white students in West Virginia over the decade. They did so between Hispanic and white students in Louisiana.

The U.S. average composite ACT score increased more for white seniors than for black or Hispanic seniors from 2001 to 2011 — for white seniors by 0.6 of a point, for Hispanic seniors by 0.2 of a point and for black seniors by 0.1 of a point.

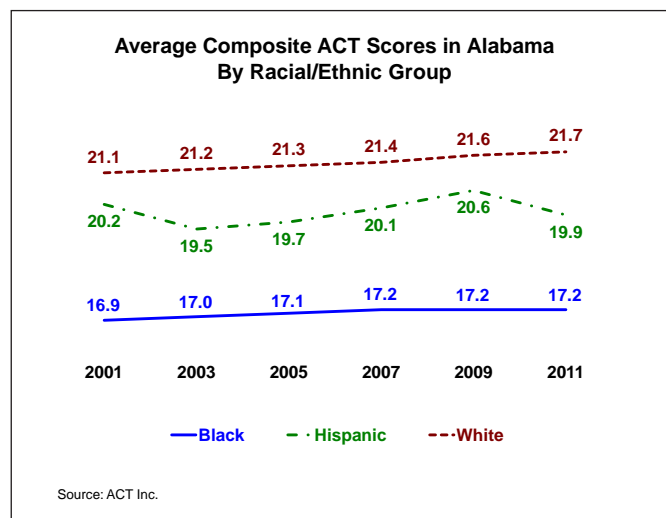
Average ACT scores are related to the percentage of seniors who took the test while in high school. When the percentage is small, the students typically are the most motivated and academically prepared, and the average score is usually high. As more students take the test, the group more closely represents a cross section of students, and the average score may drop.

The percent of white seniors who had taken the ACT in the nation and the region decreased over the decade, while the percentages of black and Hispanic seniors who had taken the ACT increased.



In Alabama:

- In 2011, 81 percent of seniors had taken the ACT while in high school, up 12 percentage points from 2001. The percent of black and Hispanic seniors who had taken the ACT also increased over the decade.
- The average composite ACT score increased by 0.2 of a point from 2001 to 2011.
- Over the decade, gaps widened between black and Hispanic seniors and their white peers.



College and Career Readiness in SREB States

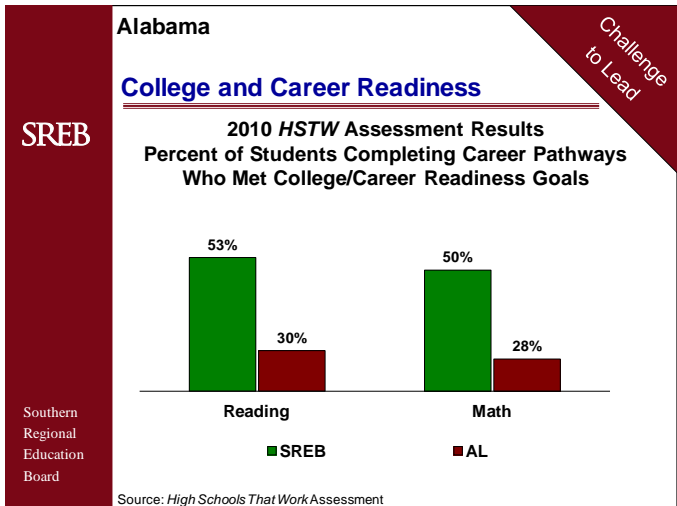
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called on states to help career/technical (CT) students complete a core of rigorous academic courses and a series of career and technical courses, plus pass appropriate exams.

Through its *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* program, SREB validated that career pathways comprising a series of CT courses linked with college-preparatory courses can improve student readiness for postsecondary education and careers. Having more students complete these pathways also can lead to improved high school graduation rates.

The 2010 *HSTW* Assessment measured 12th-graders' achievement in reading, mathematics and science. About half of the students completing a career pathway in SREB states met the *HSTW* college-readiness goals in reading and math. Students who completed a more *rigorous* pathway — which included Algebra II — were significantly more likely to meet the goals in reading and math. In 2010, 71 percent of these students completed the goal in reading and 66 percent did in math.

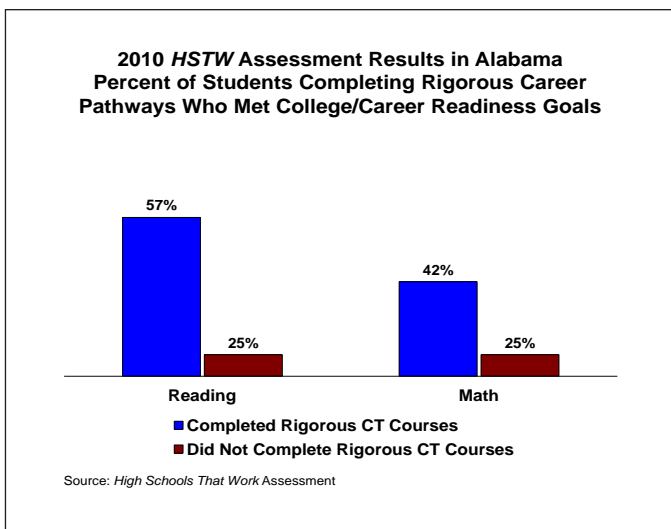
Strong support from teachers, parents and counselors is a critical motivator for students who take the rigorous CT pathways. In the SREB median states, 63 percent of students who took rigorous pathways reported that they had done so because of the additional encouragement. Taking these courses required the students to apply academic knowledge to complex hands-on projects; in doing so, they developed college- and career-readiness skills.

An SREB Governor's Committee called on states to broaden the concept of academic rigor by joining career pathways with a college-ready core. Two SREB programs help states achieve the broader concepts of rigor associated with the pathways. SREB's *Preparation for Tomorrow* consortium is a partnership of 12 states with private-sector groups that works on developing a series of career pathways that states will share. SREB also is partnering with the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education to develop 200 hours of training as instructional development for teachers.



In Alabama:

- In 2010, 30 percent of students completing a CT pathway met *HSTW*'s college-readiness reading goal; 28 percent met it in math.
- Of students completing a rigorous career pathway including Algebra II, 57 percent met *HSTW*'s reading goal; 42 percent met its math goal.
- Of students taking rigorous pathways, 58 percent got strong support from a parent, teacher or counselor to take the pathway.



Adult Literacy and Job Training in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for more adults without a high school diploma to pass GED tests. All adults in SREB states need high school credentials to earn higher wages — even those already in the work force. However, nearly 8.5 million working-age adults ages 25 to 64 in the region did not have a high school credential in 2010.

In SREB states, the majority of GED recipients in 2010 were 16 to 24 years old. This suggests that adult education and GED programs are used primarily by recent high school dropouts. Adults ages 25 to 49 without high school credentials represent many more individuals but a much smaller percentage of those who earn a GED credential.

In the nation, 27 percent of GED credentials awarded in 2010 went to 16- to 18-year-olds. Another 37 percent went to young adults 19 to 24 years old, 33 percent went to 25- to 49-year-olds, and 3 percent went to adults 50 and over.

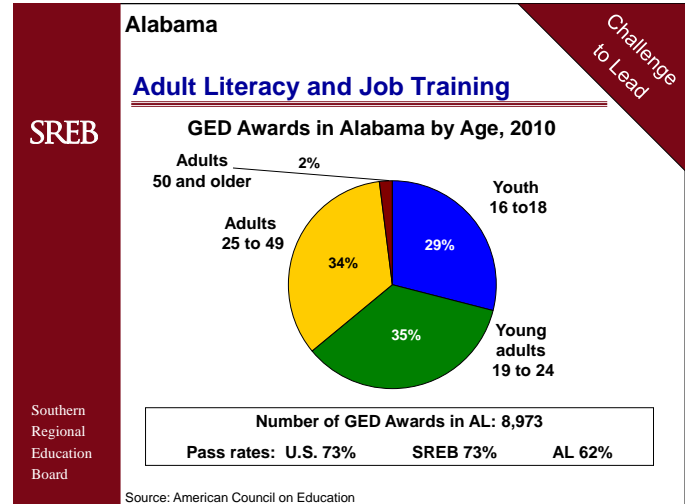
In SREB states, 29 percent of GED recipients were 16 to 18 years old, 36 percent were young adults ages 19 to 24, 33 percent were 25 to 49, and 2 percent were 50 and over.

The SREB report *A Smart Move in Tough Times: How SREB States Can Strengthen Adult Learning and the Work Force* (2010) advised states to invest state tax dollars in adult education. Working-age adults with at least a high diploma or GED credential earn more than those without credentials.

These adults are more likely to be employed. In 2010, the national employment rate was 14 percentage points higher for adults with high school credentials than for their less-educated U.S. peers. In the SREB median states, the rate was 15 points higher than for their regional peers.

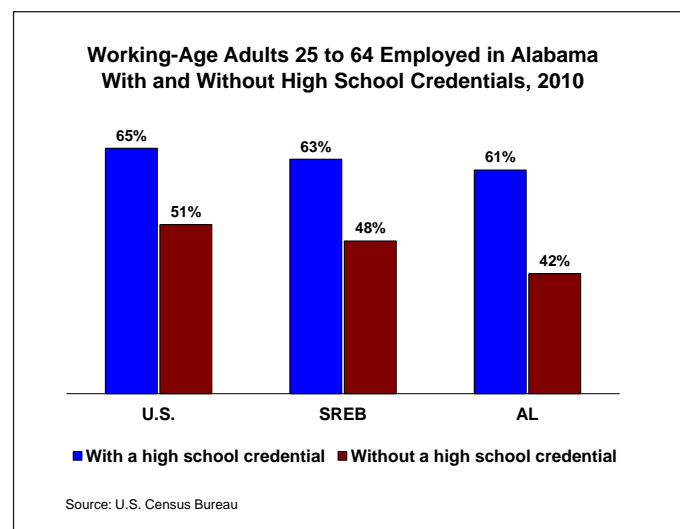
In the United States, a working-age adult with a high school credential earned on average about 70 percent more than someone who had not earned a credential.

If policy-makers pay more attention to the education needs of working-age adults, they make a solid investment in their work forces, industries, communities and nation.



In Alabama:

- Nearly two-thirds of GED credentials in 2010 were awarded to 16- to 24-year-olds. Adults ages 25 to 49 earned 34 percent of awards.
- The GED pass rate of 62 percent trailed the national and regional rates in the same year.
- The employment rate for working-age adults with high school credentials was 19 percentage points higher than for their less-educated peers.



Postsecondary Degrees and Certificates in SREB States

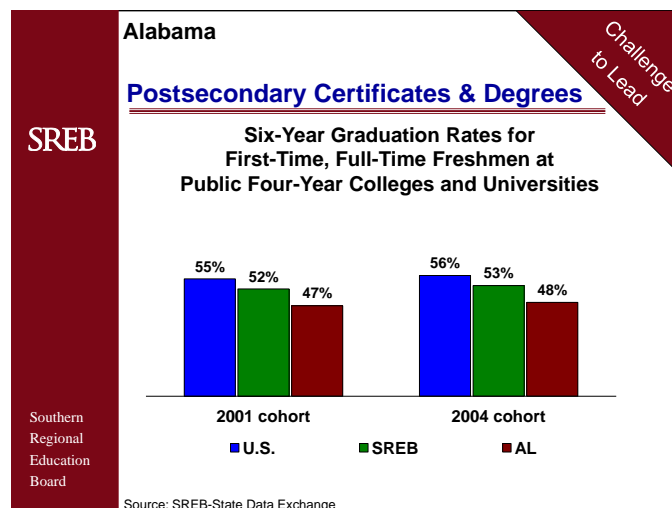
Helping higher percentages of recent high school graduates enroll in and complete their freshman year of college is key to reaching one of the *Challenge to Lead* goals — for the percentage of adults who earn college degrees or technical certificates in SREB states to exceed the national rate.

Every SREB state increased the college enrollment rate for recent high school graduates from 2000 to 2010. The region also met or exceeded the national rate four times over the decade.

The “first-year persistence rate,” the percentage of freshmen who return for a second year, has remained relatively steady in the region since 2000. Twelve SREB states increased their persistence rates over the decade, and five did so at a rate that exceeded the region.

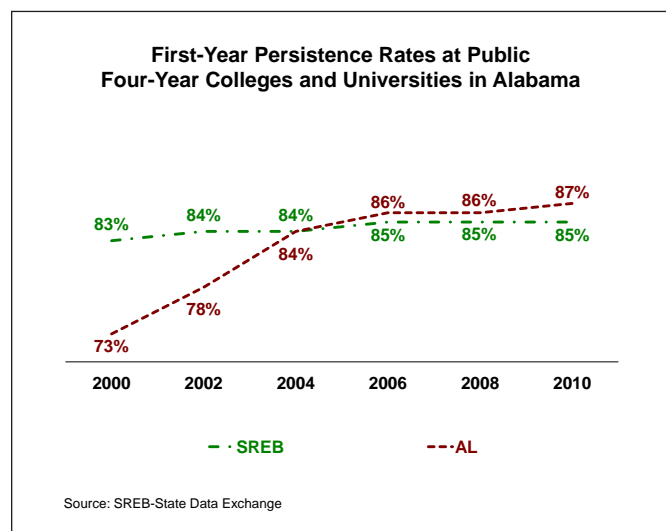
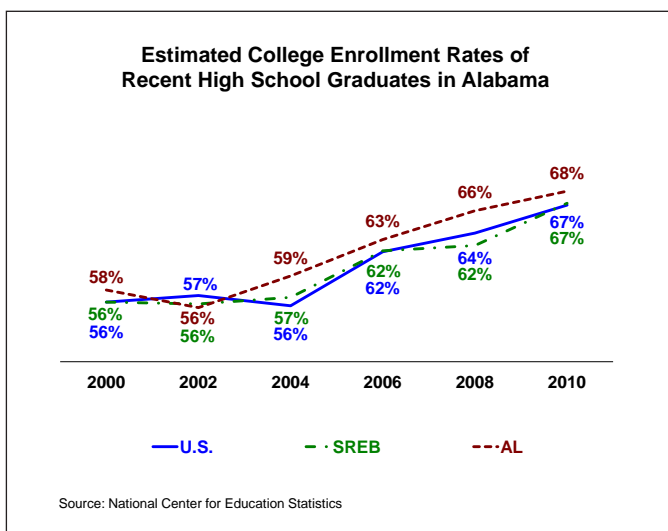
A key performance indicator for four-year colleges and universities is the six-year graduation rate. Yet colleges and universities can only count students in their graduation rates who enter as freshmen and remain at the same institution, excluding part-time students and students who transfer.

In 2010, the region trailed the nation in the percent of these freshmen who graduated from four-year colleges and universities within six years of enrolling. Even so, six SREB states exceeded the nation for freshmen who entered college in 2004 and graduated by 2010.



In Alabama:

- The percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen who graduated within six years increased 1 point from the 2001 cohort to the 2004 cohort. However, the graduation rate trailed the nation in 2010.
- The enrollment rate of recent high school graduates increased 10 points from 2000 to 2010.
- The first-year persistence rate increased 14 points over the decade — the largest increase in the region.



Postsecondary Degrees and Certificates in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to provide sufficient student financial aid to raise postsecondary education enrollment and completion rates above national averages.

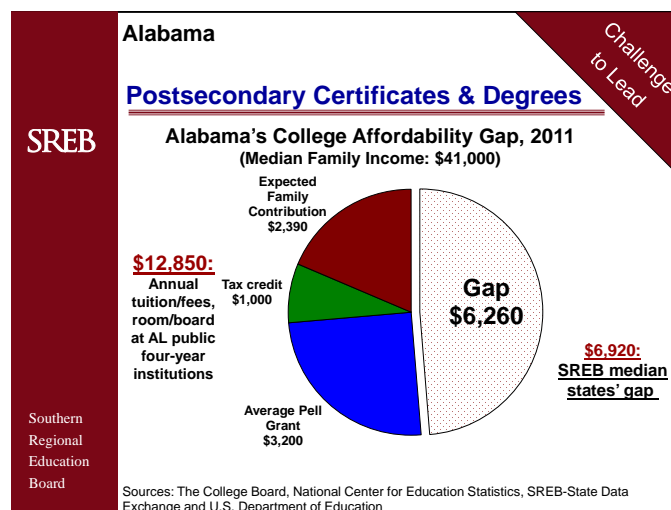
State leaders often ask whether college is priced beyond the reach of too many students. Federal aid provides grants, tax credits and loans. But loans only help students and their families stretch out the payments. Even with grants and tax credits, shortfalls — or gaps — often remain. State aid needs to help families fill these gaps.

The median one-year costs (tuition, fees, room and board) to attend a public four-year college or university in SREB states ranged from \$10,060 to \$19,140 in 2011. Families are expected to help pay these costs, and they receive notice of how much their contribution is expected to be — based on tax records — as a part of the federal financial aid process.

Need-based grants often do not cover a family's financial responsibility. Federal Pell Grants are available to students from low-income families, but the proportion of college costs covered by these grants has declined steadily over the decade. The maximum award in 2011 was \$5,550 for the neediest students — those whose families make about \$23,000 annually. Eligibility dropped to zero for students from households that earned about \$50,000 or more.

All students whose families pay taxes also are eligible for the federal American Opportunity Tax Credit, up to \$2,500. Previously, these credits were not available to families who received a federal income tax refund. As part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, up to 40 percent — or \$1,000 — of this tax credit is now refundable.

Yet family contributions, grants and tax credits taken together did not cover the median costs at a public four-year college for students from median-income families in any SREB state in 2011. **The affordability gap for median-income families in SREB median states was \$6,920 in 2011.**



In Alabama:

- A typical student from a family with a median income needed about \$6,260 in state or institutional aid to afford college without loans in 2011.
- More than half of college seniors graduated with loan debt, averaging \$24,820 in 2010 — the highest in the region.

All SREB states provide some combination of need-based and merit aid to bridge the gap. But this aid often does not fill the gap completely, forcing students and parents to find the money in other ways, including loans.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. college seniors graduated with debt in 2010. The average debt for these students was \$25,250. In addition, the current economic climate has made it difficult for recent college graduates to get jobs and begin repaying their college loans.

If employment prospects for these graduates continue to decline and student debt continues to climb, more students may choose to enroll part time, delay attending or not go to college at all.

Postsecondary Degrees and Certificates in SREB States

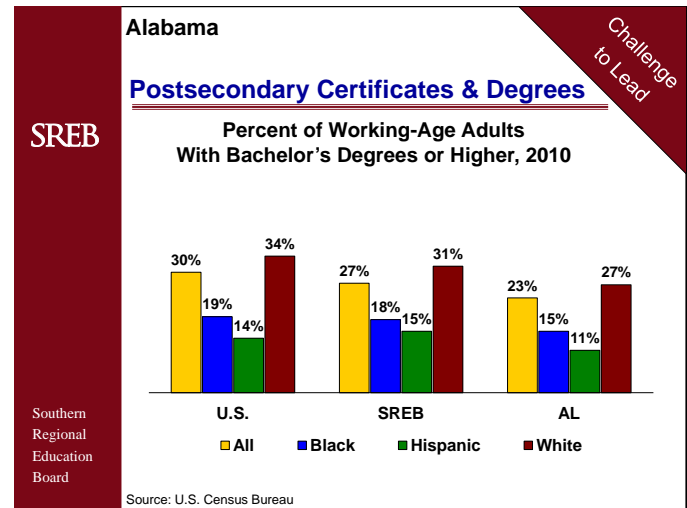
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to increase the percentage of adults with postsecondary degrees to above the national average. The number of adults with degrees in each state depends largely on the number of students who graduate from colleges and universities *in the state*. But it also depends on the movement of college graduates *among states*. In the late 1990s, several SREB states attracted college graduates to “knowledge industries,” and many of them stayed. In other states, college graduates left when job opportunities were not available locally.

Over the past 10 years, state efforts to increase the number of adults with bachelor’s degrees generally focused on increasing college enrollment and improving first-year retention. Other state efforts included better access to postsecondary education, more student financial aid and working to reduce graduation gaps between groups of students. States should continue efforts to enroll more working-age adults without college degrees and assist them as they seek to earn a postsecondary credential.

In SREB states, 27 percent of working-age adults ages 25 to 64 in 2010 had at least a bachelor’s degree, only 3 percentage points lower than in the United States. This rate remained the same as in 2005 for the region but improved 1 percentage point for the nation. In 2010, the percentage of adults with a bachelor’s degree varied widely among SREB states — from 19 percent to 38 percent.

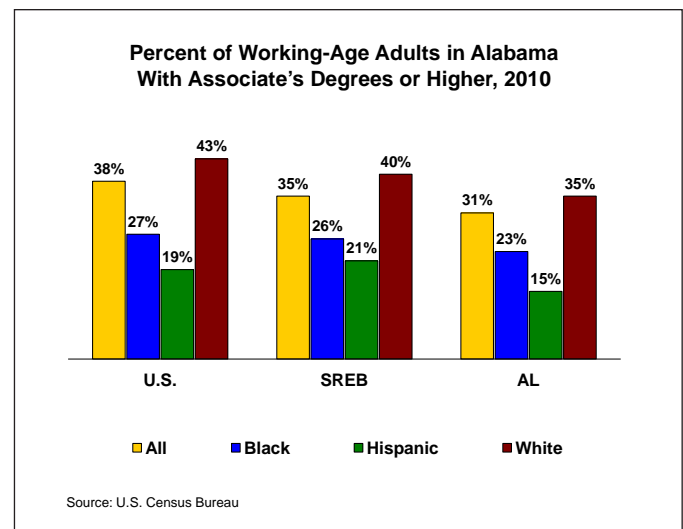
Since 2000, SREB states have worked hard to reach national rates for bachelor’s degree attainment across all racial groups. In 2010, 31 percent of white adults had a bachelor’s degree, 3 percentage points lower than their national peers. Black adults were only 1 percentage point lower than their national peers at 18 percent. Hispanic adults surpassed the rate for their national peers by 1 percentage point.

In 2010, 35 percent of working-age adults in the SREB region had at least an associate’s degree, compared with 38 percent in the United States. Since 2005, this rate improved 1 percentage point for both the region and the nation.



In Alabama:

- In 2010, 23 percent of adults ages 25 to 64 had a bachelor’s degree or higher, a lower percentage than in the nation and the region.
- Percentages of black, Hispanic and white adults with bachelor’s degrees trailed the national and regional rates for their peers.
- In 2010, 31 percent of adults had associate’s degrees or higher, 7 percentage points lower than the national rate.



College and University Faculty in SREB States

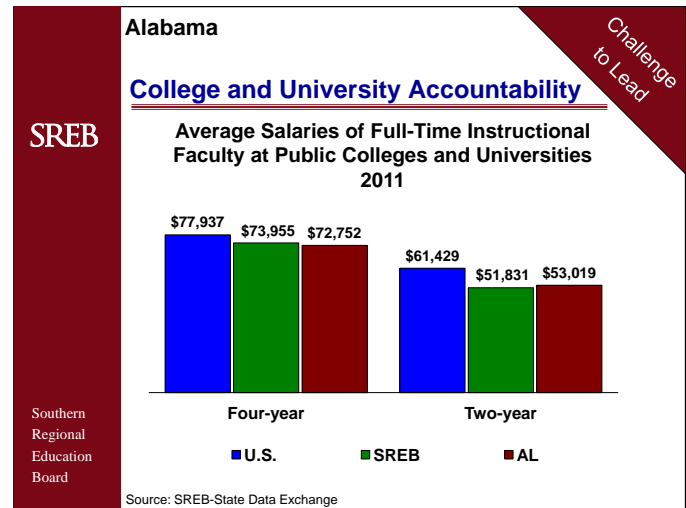
The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to ensure that salaries and benefits for college and university faculty members are competitive in the marketplace. To attract top faculty, colleges and universities need to compete in a national labor market, particularly in such disciplines as mathematics, science, engineering and business. SREB states, however, continue to trail the nation in faculty salaries.

In 2011, the SREB average salary for faculty members at public four-year colleges was \$73,955 — 95 percent of the national average. At public two-year colleges, it was \$51,831 — 84 percent of the national average. Salaries in SREB states increased in the decade since 2002 but at about the same rate as salaries in the nation.

Some policy-makers point out that if the local cost of living is lower than regional or national averages, it would seem to be appropriate for local compensation packages to be lower. Yet with the exception of obvious differences (such as real estate prices), living costs are generally the same throughout the continental United States. As a result, colleges and universities need to offer competitive compensation packages, especially in high-demand subjects.

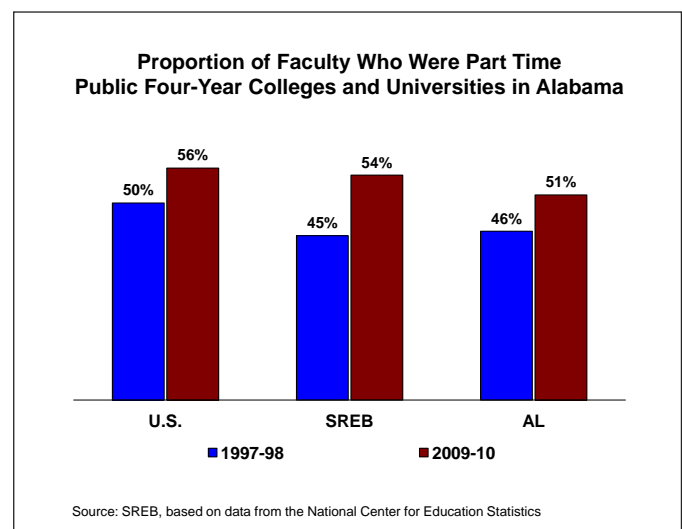
Many colleges and universities have increased their reliance on part-time faculty and teaching/research assistants. The use of part-time instructional staff at four-year colleges exceeded 50 percent of all faculty nationwide in 1998. That point came five years later in SREB states.

By 2010, the proportion of part-time instructional staff surpassed that of full-time faculty in 14 SREB states. In these states, part-time instructional staff increased by as much as 22 percent in some states and as little as 3 percent in others.



In Alabama:

- The average full-time faculty salary at public four-year colleges and universities in 2011 was \$5,185 lower than the national average and \$1,203 lower than the regional average.
- The average faculty salary at public two-year colleges in 2011 was \$8,410 lower than the national average and \$1,188 higher than the regional average.
- More than half of the faculty in public four-year colleges and universities were part time in 2010.



Qualified Teachers in SREB States

The *Challenge to Lead* goals called for SREB states to ensure that salaries, benefits and incentives for teachers are competitive in the marketplace. States need teachers who have mastered both their subjects and the skills needed to teach children effectively.

Average pay for beginning teachers is one way to compare your state's ability to compete with surrounding states, the region and the nation in attracting high-quality candidates for potential teaching jobs in your schools.

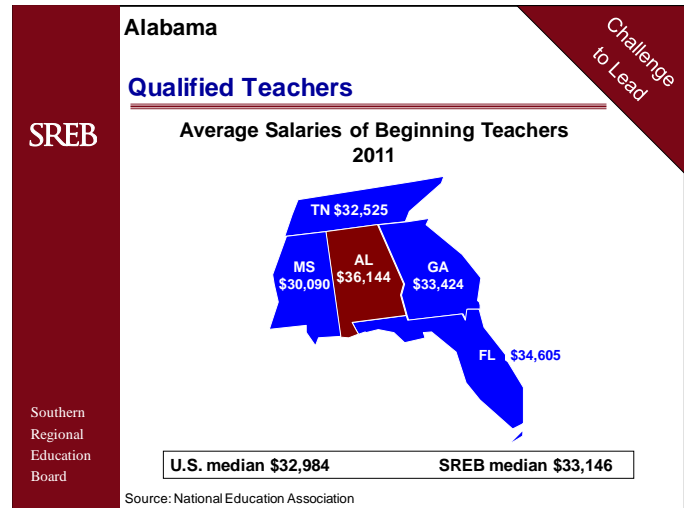
New research shows the importance of keeping good teachers. High teacher turnover is related to poor student performance. It also comes at a high financial cost; some estimates indicate that replacing teachers who leave their jobs costs states across the nation over \$2 billion a year.

Turnover is highest among beginning teachers. States should consider incentives that are designed to support new teachers and promote the longevity of effective teachers in the profession.

States also may need to provide incentives for teachers who fill specific needs, such as teaching in particular high-need subjects — including science, math and special education — or geographic locales that have a difficult time attracting qualified candidates.

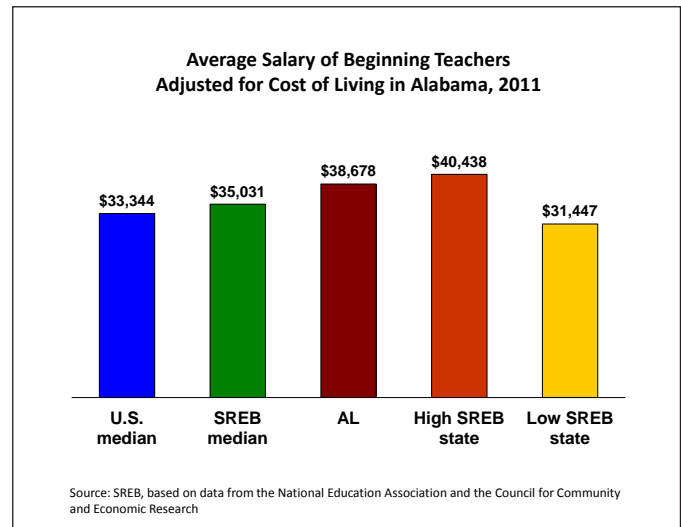
Beginning teachers in the SREB median states have earned slightly higher average salaries than beginning teachers in the nation since 2007.

After adjusting for cost of living, 12 SREB states had higher beginning teacher salaries in 2011 than in the nation, and eight states paid salaries above the SREB adjusted median salary.



In Alabama:

- The average salary for a beginning teacher in 2011 was higher than the averages in all of its neighboring states — and higher than the median in the nation and the region.
- When adjusted for cost of living, the average salary for a beginning teacher was also higher than the median in the nation and the region.



School Leadership in SREB States

When school principals know how to *lead instruction*, they can improve both teacher effectiveness and student learning.

Since 2001, SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program has worked with state education agencies, universities and leadership academies to assess leadership programs to ensure school principals have the knowledge and skills to be strong instructional leaders. The program evaluations have included the following six indicators since 2002.

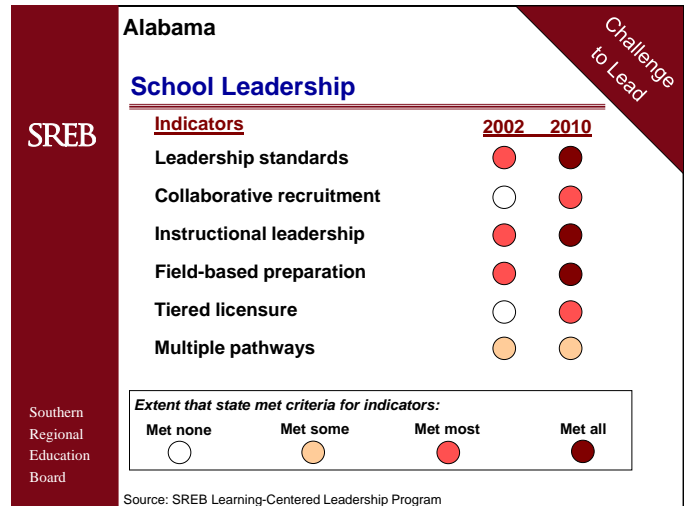
1. Leadership standards that clearly articulate a vision of instructional leaders;
2. Collaborative recruitment and selection of future school leaders by universities and districts;
3. Redesigned leadership programs that emphasize curriculum, instruction and student learning;
4. Rich, field-based experiences that prepare candidates to lead school improvement;
5. Tiered, performance-based leadership licensure; and
6. Alternative pathways to leadership.

From 2002 to 2010 more than half of SREB states made substantial progress in developing leadership standards that support the principal as the instructional leader of a school.

Seven SREB states developed policies for planning principal succession that include criteria for rigorous leadership preparation programs and collaboration between universities and districts in selecting candidates.

Nine SREB states made substantial progress in redesigning leadership preparation programs that reflect the principal as the instructional leader of a school.

Twelve SREB states made progress in ensuring that leadership preparation programs include substantial field-based experiences and in the design and implementation of tiered, performance-based systems of principal licensure. This means that, in most of the SREB region, more



In Alabama:

- Since 2002, leadership preparation programs at universities were redesigned to put an emphasis on principals as leaders of instruction.
- Leadership standards were revised to reflect what successful principals do to improve student achievement for all students.
- The state initiated a three-tiered licensure system that includes beginning, instructional and master levels.

districts are overseeing field experiences, more field experiences are taking place in diverse school settings, and candidate performance is being assessed more rigorously.

The region gained little ground in the development of multiple pathways to school leadership (such as alternative licensure and preparation, and teacher-leader certification) and the creation of specialized state services and support for principals of low-performing schools.

SREB states can rightfully claim they have made substantial progress strengthening their leadership policies, but challenges remain.

Education System Accountability in SREB States

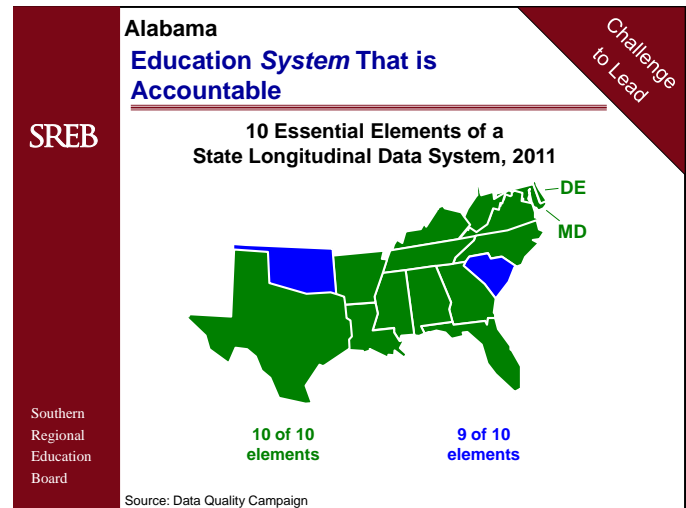
Having and using high-quality data are vital to meeting the *Challenge to Lead* goals. They called on states to track student progress from prekindergarten through higher education and into the work force. This means that states must be able to link student data with other information, such as course-taking patterns, higher education success, and faculty qualifications.

Established in 2005, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) supports the state development of data systems that can link information from multiple years and sources. DQC's initial campaign focused on the state implementation of 10 essential elements every longitudinal data system needs for success. In 2011, 14 SREB states reported that they had implemented all 10 of the elements.

DQC is currently helping states ensure better use of their data systems going forward. To support this goal, DQC has identified 10 action steps the states need to take to ensure effective data use to inform educators, policy-makers and the public. By 2011, 15 SREB states reported that they were making progress implementing the following 10 action steps.

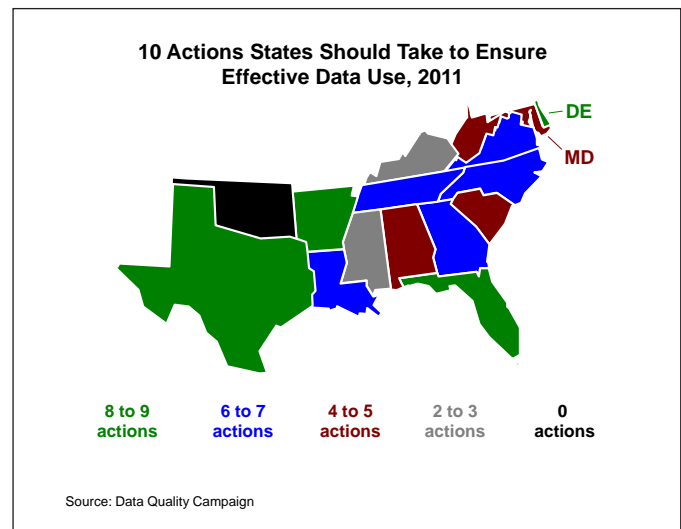
1. Link data systems from pre-k to work force;
2. Create stable support for data systems;
3. Develop data governance structures;
4. Build state data warehouses;
5. Provide for timely access to the data;
6. Create individual student progress reports;
7. Create reports using longitudinal statistics;
8. Develop pre-k to work force research agendas;
9. Promote professional development; and
10. Promote strategies to raise data awareness.

As a result of their hard work in the last 10 years, SREB states led the nation in data system development and now lead the nation toward effective use of data.



In Alabama:

- In 2011, the state reported that all 10 DQC essential elements had been implemented.
- The state also reported that it had taken four of the 10 action steps for using data effectively.



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Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at www.sreb.org.

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.

These goals are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB states adopted in 2002 and challenge the 16 SREB states to lead the nation in educational progress.

