

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Alabama Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Alabama.

This guide profiles **Alabama's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN ALABAMA

Alabama educates roughly 720,000 public K–12 students across about 138 school systems — an unusual mix of county and independent city districts. Public education is overseen by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and the State Board of Education, and paired with strong two- and four-year public colleges. Two things stand...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 6 years old
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 17
- ✓ **Systems** — County and independent city school districts
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, private, church school, or private tutor

FIRST CLASS PRE-K

Alabama's signature early-childhood program is First Class Pre-K — a voluntary, state-funded prekindergarten program for 4-year-olds that has earned national recognition, repeatedly meeting all of the National Institute for Early Education Research's quality benchmarks (a distinction few states achieve). Programs are offered through...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 6–17
Districts	~138
Testing	ACAP · ACT
Diploma	24 credits
Choice	CHOOSE Act ESA

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Alabama's roughly 138 public school systems combine county-wide districts with independent city systems. The largest include Mobile County (the state's largest), Jefferson County and Birmingham City (the Birmingham area), Montgomery County, and Baldwin County. Alabama also permits public charter schools under the 2015 Alabama School...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN ALABAMA

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed, tuition-funded schools such as Indian Springs School (near Birmingham), The Altamont School (Birmingham), Randolph School...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — Archdiocese of Mobile and Diocese of Birmingham schools (such as McGill-Toolen Catholic and John Carroll Catholic)
- ✓ **Other religious & Christian schools** — A large network of Christian and church-affiliated academies statewide
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ ALABAMA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Alabama uses the ACAP (Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program) Summative in grades 2–8, and the ACT in grade 11 (plus ACT WorkKeys). Alabama retired its former high-school graduation exam, so there's no exit-exam gate. Run by the Alabama State Department of Education.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **ACAP (grades 2–8)** — English language arts and mathematics; science in grades 4–8
- ✓ **ACT (grade 11)** — The statewide high-school test — a real, college-usable score
- ✓ **ACT WorkKeys** — A career-readiness assessment for job skills
- ✓ **ACAP Alternate** — For eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

ACAP is online with varied item types; the grade-11 ACT follows the national ACT format.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Alabama doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; districts set course and credit requirements. The grade-11 ACT provides a college-usable score.

HOW IT'S SCORED

ACAP reports performance levels; the grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.



AT A GLANCE

Grades 2–8	ACAP
Subjects	ELA, Math; Science 4–8
High school	ACT (grade 11)
Also	ACT WorkKeys
Grad requirement?	No exit-exam gate
Format	Online

TESTING WINDOWS

ACAP and the ACT are given in a spring window set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **ACT prep for grade 11** — Our ACT guide and free official ACT practice apply
- ✓ **ACAP practice** — The state provides practice resources matching the online format

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ ALABAMA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Alabama requires 24 credits with no exit exam — the Alabama High School Graduation Exam was eliminated in 2015. Students take state assessments, but a passing score is not required to graduate.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Alabama's 24-credit requirement includes 4 English, 4 math, 4 science, 4 social studies, 1 PE, 0.5 health, 0.5 computer/career, 1 arts, and electives (with a CTE/foreign language/arts pathway).

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Alabama students take state assessments (including the ACT), but a passing academic score is not required to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Alabama issues a standard diploma, with endorsements and the Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual enrollment, AP, and CTE (with industry credentials) offer accelerated and career-focused pathways.



AT A GLANCE

Credits	24
Exit exam?	No (eliminated 2015)
Diplomas	Standard + endorsements
Districts	May require more
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Alabama require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Alabama require a test to graduate?** — No — Alabama eliminated its graduation exam in 2015; a passing score is not required.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ ALABAMA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Alabama gives each school an A-F grade on the Alabama School Report Card , calculated from a points system across several indicators.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

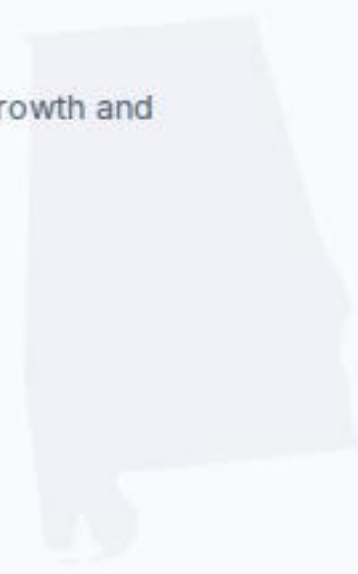
Alabama's A-F grade combines points for academic achievement, academic growth, graduation rate, college/career readiness, English-learner progress, and chronic absenteeism . The total maps to a letter. Read the indicator scores (especially growth) alongside the grade.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Alabama School Report Card (reportcard.alsde.edu) . Review the growth and indicator scores and the trend, not just the letter.



AT A GLANCE

Format	A-F letter grades
Based on	A points system across Indicator...
Tool	Alabama School Report Card
Look up at	reportcard.alsde.edu

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Alabama rate schools?** — Alabama assigns an A-F grade from a points system across achievement, growth, readiness, and more.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ ALABAMA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Alabama enacted the CHOOSE Act , a refundable tax-credit / education-savings program (about \$7,000 per student) that is phasing in — prioritizing lower-income families and students with disabilities first, then broadening over time. Alabama also has existing tax-credit scholarship programs and a public charter sector.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

The CHOOSE Act provides a refundable income-tax credit (functioning like an ESA) of roughly \$7,000 for approved education expenses including private-school tuition. Alabama also has the Alabama Accountability Act tax-credit scholarships. Confirm the current amounts and phase-in rules.

ELIGIBILITY

The CHOOSE Act phases in : early priority for lower-income families and students with disabilities , with eligibility broadening (toward universal) in later years. Confirm the current-year eligibility.

APPLYING

Apply through the Alabama Department of Revenue / program administrator for the CHOOSE Act, or a scholarship-granting organization for the tax-credit scholarships. Watch the window and confirm requirements.



AT A GLANCE

Program	CHOOSE Act (refundable tax credi...
Amount	~\$7,000 per student
Phase-in	Income-prioritized first, broad...
Also	Existing tax-credit scholarships
Confirm with	The state program

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Alabama have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes — Alabama's CHOOSE Act (~\$7,000) is phasing in, plus existing tax-credit scholarships.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ ALABAMA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Alabama certifies teachers through the Alabama State Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams (and a teaching performance assessment), and earn a Class B certificate (advancing to Class A with a master's).

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your teaching field
- ✓ **edTPA** — A teaching performance assessment completed during your program (confirm current status)
- ✓ **Note** — Basic-skills requirements are generally met through your program — confirm current requirements

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	Alabama State Dept. of Education
Content	Praxis Subject Assessments
Performance	edTPA
Certificate	Class B — then Class A (advanced...

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Alabama, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Alabamas agency and your current state

READ ALABAMA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Alabama's state aid is administered by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) , with a need-based grant and a grant for students at private colleges (funds are limited, so file early).

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

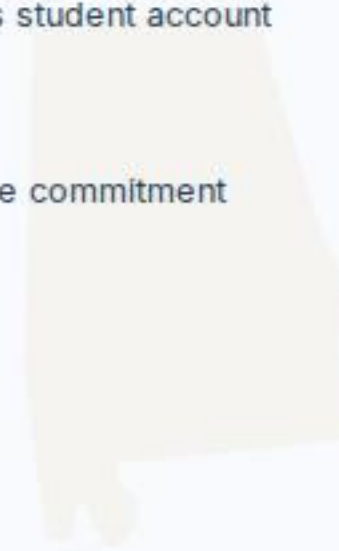
- ✓ **Alabama Student Assistance Program (ASAP)** — The state's need-based grant for Alabama residents at eligible in-state colleges — limited funds, awarded early.
- ✓ **Alabama Student Grant** — Tuition assistance for Alabama residents attending eligible private, nonprofit Alabama colleges (not need-based).
- ✓ **Alabama GI Dependent Scholarship** — Tuition benefits for dependents of qualifying disabled or deceased veterans.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Alabama's CollegeCounts 529 plan offers a state income tax deduction for contributions.

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with Alabama Commission on Higher Education** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually



AT A GLANCE

Need-based	Alabama Student Assistance Progr...
Private colleges	Alabama Student Grant
529 plan	CollegeCounts
Agency	ACHE

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Alabama state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Alabama Commission on Higher Education administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Alabama offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Alabama aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ ALABAMA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



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