



Plains Research Consortium

2025 Annual Report





Welcome to the PRC

**Clear Evidence
Healthy Schools
Strong Communities**

The Plains Research Consortium at Auburn University is a collaborative effort with the College of Education to be a leading voice in educational policy and health research. We aim to drive impactful change through rigorous empirical analysis and actionable insights. We aspire to inform and empower local, state, and national policymakers with evidence-based, nonpartisan solutions that enhance educational systems and improve outcomes for all students. Our mission is to conduct rigorous, data-driven research that addresses the most pressing challenges in education.



01 **Our Vision**

To be a leading voice in educational policy research, driving impactful change through rigorous empirical analysis and actionable insights. We aspire to inform and empower local, state, and national policymakers with evidence-based, nonpartisan solutions that enhance educational systems, and improve outcomes for all students.

02 **Our Mission**

Our mission is to conduct rigorous, data-driven research that addresses the most pressing challenges in education. By providing policymakers at local, state, and national levels with timely, relevant, and actionable insights, we aim to promote effective educational policies that improve student outcomes and strengthen the education system.

Our Values



Nonpartisan Rigor and Excellence

We are committed to the highest standards of empirical research and reporting, ensuring accuracy, reliability, and thoroughness in all our analyses.

Needs-Driven and Policy Relevant

Our research is focused on generating actionable insights that directly inform and influence local, state, and national education policies.

Transparency and Integrity

We are dedicated to ethical practices and full transparency in our methods, findings, and recommendations, ensuring trust and accountability.

Innovation and Impact

We strive to be at the forefront of innovative research methods and approaches that drive meaningful change in education policy and practice.

Timeliness and Responsiveness

We understand the urgency of educational challenges and commit to delivering research and insights that are both timely and responsive to the evolving needs of the education sector.

Collaboration and Partnerships

We believe in fostering strong partnerships with policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure our work is both impactful and relevant.

Research Briefs

Published Briefs

1. *Implementing Virginia's Cell Phone Policy*
2. *Educational Spending as Economic Development*
3. *Impacts of Student-Weighted Funding*
4. *Empowering Alabama Educators through International Experience*
5. *Advancing Computer Science Education of Pre-Service Teachers*
6. *Alabama Charter School Parent Voice*
7. *Practical Interventions for Improving Teacher Retention in Alabama*
8. *Connecting Student Learning with Social Health*

Evidence for Schools, Communities, and Policymakers

The Plains Research Consortium's research briefs are designed to translate rigorous educational research into accessible, actionable information for policymakers, school leaders, educators, and community stakeholders. Across this year's portfolio, the Consortium addressed a broad range of issues shaping schools and communities, including teacher retention, educational funding, workforce preparation, school choice, student well-being, and the implementation of emerging state policies. Several briefs focused specifically on the connection between educational systems and broader economic and community outcomes.

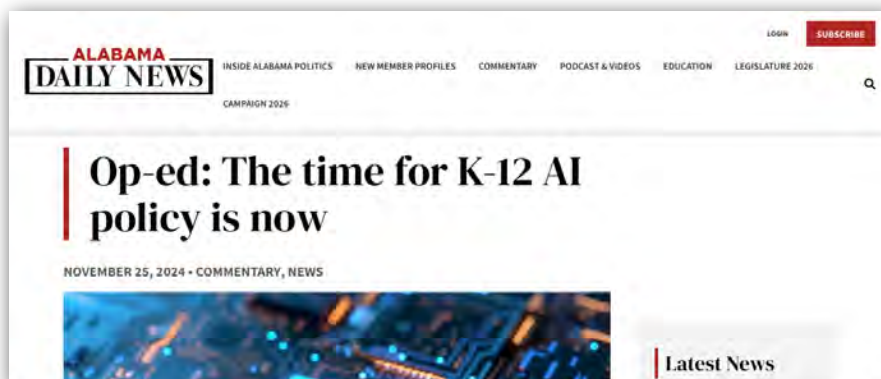
Research on educational spending and student-weighted funding highlighted how strategic investments in schools contribute not only to improved student services, but also to long-term economic growth, workforce development, increased property values, and stronger communities. Other briefs explored how community conditions influence educational outcomes, demonstrating the relationship between social health, infrastructure, and student learning across Alabama communities.

Media & Public Scholarship

News Coverage

During the past year, the Plains Research Consortium expanded its public engagement efforts through a series of media features, opinion pieces, and research-based commentary designed to inform public discussion on emerging educational issues.

Consortium scholars contributed to statewide and regional conversations on topics including school cell phone policies, artificial intelligence in K–12 education, charter school performance, and school funding reform. These contributions appeared in outlets including The Virginian-Pilot, Alabama Daily News, Capitol News Service, and Auburn University publications, helping translate educational research into accessible analysis for policymakers, educators, families, and the broader public. Several pieces directly connected ongoing Consortium research to active legislative and policy debates, including commentary on the implementation challenges of statewide cell phone restrictions and the growing need for proactive K–12 artificial intelligence policy frameworks.



- 1. Cell phone policy success hinges on implementation. The Virginian-Pilot.***
- 2. The time for K-12 AI policy is now. Alabama Daily News.***
- 3. Lawmakers tighten school cell phone policy, but teachers question efficacy. Capitol News Service.***
- 4. Alabama's public charter schools outperform traditional public schools, new study shows. Alabama Daily News.***
- 5. Column: Why should I care about a new school funding system? Alabama Daily News.***
- 6. A formula for the future: Auburn University professor's research furthers work, legacy of late colleague involving new state school funding formula. Auburn University College of Education.***

Building Capacity



Hosting the State Superintendent of Education

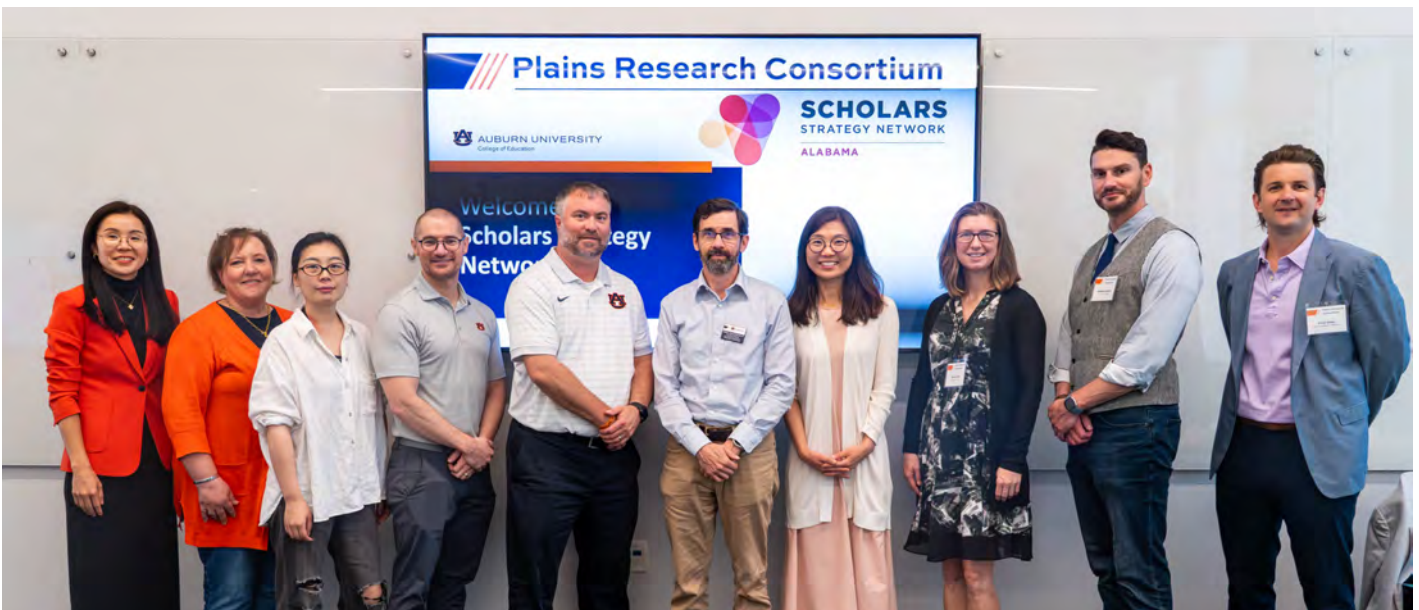
This October the PRC hosted a visit from State Superintendent of Education Dr. Eric Mackey.

Along with State Board of Education Member Tracie West and Deputy State School Superintendent Angela Martin, PRC members discussed shared visions and priorities as well as initiatives in support of state education endeavors.

Extending the Network

In April, the PRC hosted the Alabama Delegation of the Scholars Strategy Network

The visit highlighted ongoing faculty engagement with state policy issues such as school funding, teacher workforce sustainability, leadership development and student outcomes. SSN leaders shared information about membership opportunities, training resources and strategies for translating research into policy briefs and public-facing scholarship.



Supporting the Next Generation

Connecting with Scholars at MSERA

A central component of the Plains Research Consortium's mission is the development and mentorship of emerging scholars. During the past year, the Consortium supported several graduate students in presenting their research at the Mid-South Educational Research Association annual conference in New Orleans. Through conference participation, students gained valuable experience engaging with academic audiences, receiving professional feedback, and contributing to broader conversations in educational research and policy. The Consortium views these opportunities as an important investment in the next generation of educational researchers and leaders, helping students strengthen their research skills, expand professional networks, and develop confidence as scholars capable of informing practice and policy.



Making an Impact



Informing Alabama School Funding Reform

Consortium research and consultation contributed to the development and advancement of the RAISE Act, including discussions related to funding categories, weighting structures, implementation strategy, and public framing of the legislation. Research briefs produced by the Consortium were distributed to and cited by members of the Alabama House and Senate Education Policy Committees as policymakers considered approaches to modernizing the state's school funding system. This work culminated in participation in the official signing of the legislation alongside state leaders, reflecting the Consortium's commitment to providing research-informed support for major educational policy initiatives in Alabama.





Looking Forward

Our goal is to be a leading voice in educational policy research, driving impactful change through rigorous empirical analysis and actionable insights. In the coming years, we will focus on the following priorities:

01

Expanding Research-to-Practice Partnerships

The Plains Research Consortium aims to deepen partnerships with school districts, state agencies, and community organizations to ensure research efforts remain closely connected to the practical challenges facing schools and communities. Future initiatives will prioritize collaborative projects that allow policymakers and practitioners to directly engage with research design, interpretation, and implementation.

02

Increasing Policy-Relevant Research

Building on recent work surrounding school funding reform, educator workforce issues, and technology policy, the Consortium plans to continue producing timely research briefs and policy analyses that support evidence-based decision-making in Alabama and beyond. Particular emphasis will be placed on emerging issues such as artificial intelligence in schools, educator retention, student well-being, and equitable educational funding systems.

03

Supporting the Next Generation of Educational Scholars

The Consortium remains committed to developing graduate students and early-career researchers through mentorship, collaborative research opportunities, conference participation, and applied policy engagement. Expanding opportunities for students to contribute to research dissemination and public scholarship will remain a central priority.

04

Building a Stronger Evidence Infrastructure for Alabama

A long-term ambition of the Consortium is to contribute to a stronger statewide evidence infrastructure that supports continuous improvement in education policy and practice. By connecting research, policy, and local implementation, the Consortium hopes to help strengthen Alabama's capacity for data-informed educational decision-making.

Connect



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