Summary: This 2019-20 profile of Alabama’s public K-12 school finance system focuses on three core indicators from the School Finance Indicators Database: fiscal effort, statewide adequacy, and equal opportunity. On a weighted average of these three measures (see back), Alabama scores 30 out of 100, which ranks 42nd out of the 48 states with possible ratings.

FISCAL EFFORT

Fiscal effort is a measure of how much states devote to their schools as a share of their economic capacity (i.e., ability to raise revenue). Effort is calculated by dividing direct state and local K-12 expenditures in each state by its gross state product (GSP).

- AL is a medium effort state.
- In FY 2020, AL spent 3.65% of its economic capacity (GSP) on its K-12 public schools.
- This was 0.04 percentage points higher than the unweighted national average of 3.61%.
- AL’s effort level ranks #24 in the nation (out of 50).

Effort trend and capacity
- AL’s 2020 effort level is 0.37 pct. points lower than it was pre-recession (2006).
- This net change in effort between 2006 and 2020 is ranked #40 in the nation.

STATEWIDE ADEQUACY

Statewide adequacy compares actual per-pupil (PP) spending in each state to district-level cost model estimates of the amount required to achieve the modest goal of U.S. average test scores. The graphs to the right indicate the percentage of students in districts where spending is below adequate and the funding gap (% above/below) in the typical student’s district. The graphs include regional and national averages.

- Overall adequacy in AL is relatively low.
- By the modest standard of U.S. average scores, 77.7 percent of AL students attend inadequately funded districts, which ranks #39 in the nation (out of 49).
- The typical AL student’s district spends 27.7 percent below adequate levels, which ranks #47 in the nation.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Equal opportunity is the comparison of adequacy between each state’s higher- and lower-poverty districts. The graph to the right presents adequate funding gaps by district poverty quintile (the blue diamonds are U.S. averages). The difference (in pct. points) between the lowest- and highest-poverty groups is a state’s “opportunity gap.”

- Educational opportunity in AL is highly unequal.
- Spending in AL’s highest-poverty districts is 51.9 percent ($11,681 PP) below the estimated adequate level, compared with 6.4 percent ($617 PP) above adequate in the state’s most affluent districts.
- This opportunity gap of -58.3 percentage points is ranked #25 in the nation (out of 48).

Adequacy gaps by outcome gaps
- AL’s opportunity gap contributes to a student outcome gap: the state’s highest-poverty districts (pink dot) score 0.88 s.d. below its lowest-poverty districts (blue dot).
The data in this state profile are from the School Finance Indicators Database (SFID), a collection of public K-12 school finance and resource allocation indicators published annually by researchers from the Albert Shanker Institute, University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, and Rutgers University Graduate School of Education. The primary product of the SFID is the State Indicators Database (SID), a state-level dataset containing roughly 125 variables. This profile focuses on three types of measures included in the SID: fiscal effort, statewide adequacy, and equal opportunity. The full SID dataset, along with accessible documentation of and data sources for all the measures presented in this profile, as well other SFID datasets, tools, and reports, are freely available to download at schoolfinancedata.org. The following are some general notes about the profiles, followed by descriptions and notes pertaining to the three types of measures they present:

**The years in the profile refer to the spring semester of the school year. (e.g., 2020 is 2019-20).**

**Estimates may differ slightly from previous profiles, as some measures are changed or improved each year, and all years are recalculated annually with updated data.**

**Due to rounding, some estimates from users’ manual calculations may not exactly match.**

**The total number of states assigned rankings varies slightly by measure, as not all measures are available in all states.**

**Overall state scores:** The overall scores reported at the top of the profile provide a very simple summary of states’ combined “performance” on the three core indicators featured in the profile. They do not represent comprehensive evaluations of states’ school finance systems. Each state is scored entirely relative to other states (i.e., rather than based on some absolute standard of “good” or “bad”), and the selection/weighting of components entails subjective judgments on the part of the SFID research team.

**The scores are calculated as a weighted average of z-scores (final averages expressed as percentile equivalents, with a score of 50 = z-score of 0) of the following measures (weights in parentheses):**

1. percent of students in districts with above adequate funding (22.5%); 2. statewide (%) adequacy gap (22.5%); 3. GSP-based fiscal effort (15%); 4. personal income-based fiscal effort (15%); and 5. equal opportunity gap (Q5/Q1 difference in adequacy gap, in percentage points) (25%). State rankings may reflect differences in unrounded measures.

**D.C., Hawaii, and Vermont are not assigned scores, as one or more of the measures that constitute the scores cannot be calculated for these states.**

**Non-SFID data sources:**

- (Contextual State) table: 1) Child (5-17 year old) poverty (2020) from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program; 2) see SID documentation for sources used for public school coverage estimates; 3) percent of total (FY 2020) revenue from state sources from the U.S. Census Bureau Annual Survey of School System Finances; 4) total state public elementary and secondary school enrollment (Fall 2019) from the Digest of Education Statistics, published by the National Center for Education Statistics.

### Fiscal effort

Fiscal effort indicates how much of a state’s total economic capacity goes toward K-12 schools. It is calculated in the SFID by dividing direct state and local K-12 expenditures by either Gross State Product (GSP) or aggregate state personal income. Both of these are measures of a state’s economic capacity. In this sense, effort measures how much each state contributes as a percentage of how much it might contribute. The former denominator (GSP) is used in these profiles, but the two are highly correlated, and the income-based effort indicator is available in the SID. Bear in mind that high-capacity states with larger economies, such as New York and California, can put forth lower effort than lower capacity states, such as Mississippi and Alabama, but high-capacity states that do the same thing (in terms of per-pupil effort) as lower-capacity states have the capacity to increase revenue by a greater percentage (due to per-pupil GDP being spread over a larger economic base). Also, any effort calculated as quarterly GSP estimates are not available before that.

The table in the right panel summarizes the center line of the graph. The table is a means of differentiating between low/inadequate funding states that do and do not have the capacity to increase revenue. Each state/year combination in which 2016-2020 exceeded the state’s 2006 GSP, the hypothetical additional spending is (in the hypothetical additional funding estimates do not include years in which 2016-2020 funding would have been lower under states’ 2006 effort levels).

### Statewide adequacy

Adequacy is typically defined as the extent to which the amount of funding for schools is sufficient for students to reach a minimum/acceptable level of educational outcomes. Our adequacy estimates compare each district’s actual spending levels to estimates from cost models of how much that district would have to spend in order to achieve national average test scores (i.e., “required” or “adequate” spending). We express statewide adequacy in terms of either: 1) the proportion of students in each state in districts with actual funding below estimated adequate levels; and 2) the adequacy gap (percentage difference between actual and estimated adequate spending) for the typical student in each state. All these estimates are from the National Education Cost Model (NECM), which is part of the SFID. The NECM calculates required spending based on the relationships between outcomes and cost factors such as regional wage variation, district size, and student characteristics. Note that this model and the data it uses are necessarily imperfect, and estimates should be viewed with appropriate caution. For more information about the NECM, see the SID user’s guide. Some of the estimates presented in this section of the profile can be calculated using SID variables, whereas others (e.g., the district-by-district estimates in the right panel) require the use of the School Finance Cost Database (ODC); many but not all SID adequacy measures (all of which have variable name beginning with necm_) are aggregations of DCD estimates. The full DCD dataset (going back to 2009) is also publicly available at the SFID website (2020 estimates will be released in early 2023).

Statewide adequacy controls for differences in GDP (due to the fact that all districts in all states are not equally self-sufficient) and for Vermont between 2017 and 2020 (due to data irregularities). Estimates for D.C. apply to a single school district (District of Columbia Public Schools).

In the first bullet of the left panel, we characterize statewide adequacy as follows: high (fewer than 20 percent of students in below adequate districts) or adequate (more than 20 percent of students in below adequate districts).

The regional cost areas in the graph are U.S. Census divisions (9 groups). AL’s division is East South Central. Axis ranges for the vertical graph may vary by state. The table in the right panel provides estimates for the adequacy gap for the 10 largest (enrollment) districts in this state. The first bullet directly below the table presents the number of districts with below adequate funding as well as the total number of districts in this state with valid estimates.

### Equal opportunity

Equal educational opportunity is achieved in a given state when none of that state’s districts are substantially further above or below adequate spending levels than are other districts. In the SFID, we measure equal opportunity (EO) with the same NECM estimates used for statewide adequacy (see above), but in this case by comparing adequacy gaps (percentage difference between actual and estimated adequate spending) between the highest- and lowest-poverty districts in each state. That is, each state’s “opportunity gap” is the difference (in percentage points) between these two groups (district poverty groups are defined in terms of quintiles—e.g., the 20 percent highest-poverty districts compared with the 20 percent lowest-poverty districts in each state). Note that EO is conceptually independent of nationwide poverty trends (e.g., a hypothetical state in which all districts are below adequate funding levels might still exhibit EO, so long as high- and low-poverty districts are inadequate by roughly the same proportions, whereas highly unequal opportunity might exist in a state in which funding is universally adequate, if high-poverty districts are more adequately funded than lower-poverty districts.

EO estimates are not available for Vermont and Hawaii (adequacy estimates not available), and cannot be calculated for D.C. (single government-run district state).

In the first bullet of the left panel, we characterize EO in each state as follows: severely unequal (EO gap less than -75 points); highly unequal (EO gap between -30 and -75 points); moderately unequal (-30 to -5 points); slightly unequal (-5 to +5 points); and essentially equal (+5 to +50 points).

The center panel figure presents adequate funding gaps for all five quintiles in each state (although opportunity gaps as we define them for the purposes of this profile use only the highest- and lowest-poverty groups, this graph permits comparison of gaps between different combinations of groups). The state (bars) and U.S. (blue diamonds) estimates in the graph are average differences between actual and required spending (weighted by enrollment), by district poverty quintile. Note, however, that poverty quintiles are defined state by state, and so the U.S. averages (blue diamonds) represent an approximation of the national situation. Axis ranges for this graph may vary between states.