

A+ EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

RAISE ACT

RAISE Act Implementation Toolkit

Supporting Students in Poverty

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About this Toolkit

This toolkit is for district and school leaders, school board members, families, and community members to learn about the Renewing Alabama's Investment in Student Excellence (RAISE) Act implementation. It includes information about the 2025 legislation, the district budgeting process and how to get involved, and how Alabama's districts and schools can support the student groups identified in the RAISE Act.

Here is a preview of what you will see:

Overview of the RAISE Act 1

Who is supported by the RAISE Act? 3

Supporting Students in Poverty 4

Strategy #1: Increase Academic Learning Time 5

Strategy #2: Intervene Early in Literacy and Math 7

Strategy #3: Create a Multi-Tiered System of Support 8

Strategy #4: Integrate Wraparound Supports 9

Strategy #5: Meaningfully Engage Families 10

Now What? 11

The Local Budget Process 11

What's Next for District Leaders? 13

What's Next for Advocates? 14

Overview of the RAISE Act

What is the RAISE Act? How does it benefit students?

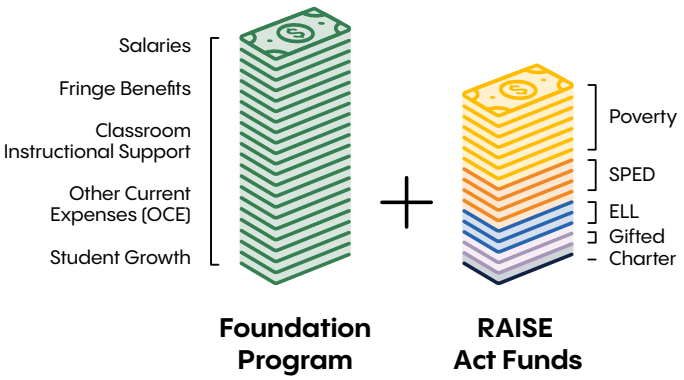
For 30 years, Alabama schools were funded based on how many students attended, instead of what those students needed. The RAISE Act of 2025 updated the old formula by adding more money for students who need it most. More funds for students can be transformational, with research showing that additional dollars translate to better outcomes for students. RAISE funds are flexible, and districts can decide how to spend them in ways that best help their students. Districts can now hire aides or tutors, run summer and afterschool programs, or pursue other resources that directly support students with the RAISE Act. Districts started receiving RAISE Act funds in the 2025-2026 school year.

Why should I get involved?

RAISE funds must be used on student needs. The RAISE Act increased the funding available for students in poverty and English language learners, and generated funds for special education students at the state level for the first time in Alabama's history. We must make sure that districts are using this money to give students the resources they need. **To do that, districts need to hear innovative and effective ideas that have worked in Southern schools – and the voices of parents, families, students, and communities need to be heard and valued in the decision-making process.**

How much money does the RAISE Act invest in students?

The Foundation Program remains Alabama's primary school funding formula, while the RAISE Act provides additional funding for student needs. In its first year (2025-2026), $166 million was sent to districts for five student groups: students in poverty, special education students, English learners, gifted students, and charter school students. In the second year, $191 million was appropriated. The Alabama Legislature is committed to the RAISE Act, and these funds will keep supporting students long-term.



How is the RAISE Act funded?

The RAISE Act is funded through the annual Education Trust Fund budget and a dedicated reserve fund. The RAISE Fund was started with $375 million in FY26 and grew to $700 million in FY27 using money transferred from the Education Opportunities Reserve Fund. The RAISE Fund will grow over time through transfers and investments to fund future years.

How are RAISE Act funds calculated for each school district?

The RAISE Act established five student groups. Each student group has a weight, which is a percentage of the base amount that determines their additional funding. Here is the formula to determine how money flows from the state to districts for RAISE funds:

1. The state's Foundation Program per-pupil funding average from the previous year is the "base" amount. The base is defined each year in the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget. In the 2026–2027 school year, the base was $7,829.
2. Each student group is assigned a weight, which is a percentage of the base amount, that determines their additional funding. Weights are set in the ETF budget annually.
3. Districts receive their RAISE Funds based on the number of students they have in each group. The Alabama Department of Education releases the official totals for each district for each student group.

STUDENT GROUP	FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026			FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027		
	Weighted Allocation	Funding/ Student	Statewide Funding	Weighted Allocation	Funding/ Student	Statewide Funding
Students in Poverty	2.25%	$170	$68.2 million	2.75%	$215	$86.8 million
Special Education: Tier 1	2%	$151	$48.8 million	2.5%	$196	$54.1million
Special Education: Tier 2	10%	$755		10%	$783	
Special Education: Tier 3	75%	$5,660		75%	$5,872	
ELL Students: Districts under 9% ELL	7%	$528	$33.5 million	7%	$548	$34.4 million
ELL Students: Districts over 9% ELL	10%	$755		10%	$783	
Gifted Students 5% of ADM	4.50%	$340	$12.2 million	4.75%	$372	$13.6 million
Charter School	2%	$151	$1.1 million	2%	$157	$1.4 million
Base Factor	$7,547			$7,829		
TOTAL	**$166 million**			**$191 million**		

How do I find out how much money my district received?

Each year, the Alabama Department of Education will release a memo to districts outlining the RAISE funds they will receive for the upcoming school year. The memo for 2026 is accessible here.

How will the state ensure that districts are investing RAISE funds well?

All RAISE Act funds must be spent on the students who generate them. Planned accountability measures include:

- Districts will annually report their yearly plan covering student achievement goals, how RAISE funds will be spent, and progress updates.
- The ALSDE will create a statewide application by fiscal year 2028 to align with state priorities and meet federal and state requirements.
- A RAISE Act Accountability and Implementation Board will be set up by July 1, 2028, to monitor districts and make sure funds are spent effectively.
- A Review Committee will track the overall progress of the RAISE Act and suggest improvements.

Who is supported by the RAISE Act?

The RAISE Act provides funds for five specific student groups: students in poverty, special education students, English language learners, gifted students, and charter school students. These groups were chosen based on Alabama's needs, and based on evidence that shows how additional funds lead to improved outcomes.

According to 2025–2026 student demographic data:

59%

of Alabama's students are living in poverty.

Students in poverty face additional challenges compared to their peers, which can lead to lower reading, math, and graduation rates.

14.4%

of Alabama's students receive special education services.

Special education students can receive a wide range of services tailored to their specific needs.

7%

of Alabama's students are English language learners.

English language learners have specific needs based on their first language and their fluency levels.

1.3%

of Alabama's students attend public charter schools.

When we look at all local, state, and federal dollars per student, charter school students experience up to a $5,000 gap when compared to traditional public school students.

5%

of Alabama's students are considered gifted.

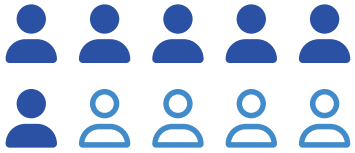
Prior to RAISE, Alabama's education budget supported limited grants to some schools' gifted student programs — but we know there are gifted students in all schools.

Supporting Students in Poverty

In this section, we will dive into who Alabama's students in poverty are, and how RAISE funds can be used to support them at the district level.

Who are Alabama's students in poverty?

More than half of Alabama students (59%) qualify for free or reduced-price meals, or are enrolled in SNAP or TANF. For the RAISE Act, Alabama also includes homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster care students as living in poverty. For the second year of the RAISE Act, $86 million, or about $212 per student, went to students in poverty.

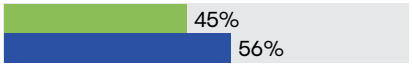


Why do students in poverty require additional funding?

All students are capable of academic and long-term success. Students in poverty may need additional support to access academic opportunities, to set them up for beneficial, lifelong outcomes.

Alabama's students in poverty – who represent 59% of the student population – have lower proficiency rates on English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests, graduate at a lower rate, and experience chronic absenteeism at a higher rate than students not experiencing poverty.

- In ELA, based on the 2025 statewide ACAP Assessment, 45% of students in poverty are proficient, compared with 56% of all students.



- In Math, based on the 2025 statewide ACAP Assessment, 22% of students in poverty are proficient, compared with 33% for all students.



- 88% of students in poverty graduate, compared to 92% of all students.



- 15% of students in poverty are chronically absent, compared with 12% for all students.



Students in poverty face additional challenges that higher-income students don't, and the reasons vary by community. District leaders must review local data, and talk with students, families, teachers, and community members to find the main causes. That information can guide RAISE Act investments. Some of these root causes include:

- **Physical and mental health disparities, such as chronic illness and stress,** can negatively impact language, brain development, and energy levels.[1]
- **Unequal access to learning opportunities in-and out-of-school** can lead to students starting elementary school and arriving each day less prepared to learn than their peers, and contributes to widening gaps over time.[2]
- **Negative environmental factors, such as poor air and water quality or unstable housing,**[3] can lead to unhealthy outcomes, increase chronic absenteeism, and reduce readiness to learn.[4]
- **Attending schools that serve large percentages of low-income students, that often have fewer resources**[5] **and fewer veteran teachers,**[6] which can decrease educational opportunities, widen achievement gaps, decrease the graduation rate, and contribute to long-term economic challenges.[7]

Strategy #1: Increase Academic Learning Time

Students in poverty tend to miss more school and have fewer chances to learn outside the classroom than their peers. Students who are chronically absent — missing 18 or more days a year — score about 5% lower in math and reading. RAISE funds could be used to improve attendance and extend learning time to improve outcomes for students in poverty.

How can districts use RAISE funds to increase student attendance to maximize learning time?

- Communicate with families directly
  - → Automatically send reminders to families about school hours and holidays.[8]
  - → Send personalized messages to families when students are not in class.[9]
- Create an early warning system
  - → Use real-time data on student attendance, academic performance, and behavioral incidents to predict if students are at risk of missing school.[10]

Highlight: Mobile County Public Schools created the Helping Families Initiatives, which used data to identify at-risk students and helped their families develop individualized plans with community partners to address needs of each unique student. The program decreased truancy and chronic absenteeism each by 50%.[11]

- Develop a mentorship program
  - → Assign each student to a mentor in the building who connects with them daily. These programs have added 9 days to student attendance rates.[12]
- Provide ongoing support
  - → Hire a site coordinator who can engage with local families and determine the best way to improve attendance for the community.[13]
  - → Create attendance competitions between classes or between schools with prizes.

Highlight: Robertsdale Elementary School in Baldwin County, where almost all students are living in poverty, reduced its chronic absenteeism rate from 18.5% to 9.5% between 2024 and 2025. They added attendance information to the daily morning announcements, held a schoolwide parent meeting with door prizes, and shared a video on why school attendance is important.[14]

How can districts use RAISE funds to extend learning time?

High-Quality Summer and Afterschool Programs[15]

- Align summer and afterschool programs to school curriculum.
- Focus on the subjects students need based on their state assessment scores.[16]
- Train teachers and support staff in extended learning time on the school curriculum.[17]

Students who attend 20+ days of summer school have significantly better outcomes in math and reading.[18]

Students who attended for two summers outperformed students who did not by up to a 20% difference in both reading and math.

Highlight: Alabama's Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL) programs use a data-driven approach and small group structures to improve student learning. In six weeks, these programs have average learning gains equivalent to 1.9 months of reading instruction and 2.7 months of math instruction.[19]

Change the District Calendar

- Shorter breaks throughout the year instead of a longer summer will limit summer slide.
- Align school, summer, afterschool, before school, and holiday programs with parent work schedules.

Highlight: Birmingham City Schools hosts two intersessions annually to provide optional additional learning time. In February 2026, about 6,000 students participated, representing almost one-third of district students.[20]

How do you know if a summer and afterschool program is effective?

- ☑ It is a high-quality program that's aligned to the school curriculum.
- ☑ Students are engaged and want to attend. Enrichment is the fun part of summer and afterschool programs that keeps students engaged and coming back.
- ☑ The program is aligned to parent work schedules. Full day programs that provide transportation are best.
- ☑ The teachers and staff are certified, or trained and coached to ensure that they're effective.
- ☑ Class sizes are small, and do not exceed 20 students.





Strategy #2: Intervene Early in Literacy and Math

Students in poverty often come to school behind their peers in literacy and math. Alabama's Literacy Act[21] and Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI)[22] established a statewide, early literacy system requiring universal screening, targeted interventions, and evidence-based instruction aligned to the Science of Reading. Alabama's Numeracy Act requires 60 minutes of math instruction daily, dedicated math coaches, and provides for targeted interventions for struggling students.

Identifying students who are struggling in literacy and math early is crucial, especially for students in poverty. Research reviewing a 15-year span and 33 rigorous studies found "significant positive effect" on reading outcomes through early interventions targeted to students with reading difficulties.[23]

How can districts use RAISE funds to support literacy and numeracy?

- High Dosage Tutoring
  - → Small group or 1:1 touchpoints at least weekly, that is aligned with Tier 1 content being taught in the classroom.[24]
- Teacher Professional Development and Collaboration
  - → Provide time for teaching teams to analyze student data and discuss rapid actions that can be taken to support struggling students.
  - → Create stipends for teachers for professional learning in the Science of Reading.
  - → Fund professional development for teachers that work with students in all subjects, not just K-3.
  - → Hire instructional coaches to support teachers as they learn to implement new strategies.
- High-Quality Instructional Materials
  - → Materials need to align with Alabama's standards to be used in classrooms.

Highlight: Birmingham City Schools used a rapid-cycle intervention program to improve literacy, resulting in a 28-point percentage increase of 3rd-grade reading sufficiency (53% in 2023 to 81% in 2024).[25]

Highlight: Start the Adventure in Reading (STAIR) is a nonprofit organization in Birmingham. STAIR partners with 14 Birmingham City Schools to provide tutoring and family resources.

Strategy #3: Create a Multi-Tiered System of Support

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, or MTSS, is a way to structure instruction within schools using live student data, to provide more academic and behavioral support based on specific student needs. MTSS uses student data to tell teachers which type of instruction each specific student needs in a given area. They require schools and districts to collect and analyze student data, and create the right interventions to improve outcomes. Interventions will always be a combination of **Tier 1** instruction that is universal for all students, **Tier 2** instruction that is targeted for some students, and **Tier 3** instruction that is intensive for individual students.[26]

MTSS works best when it is fully implemented. This system, when fully implemented, has improved behavior and improved reading scores for 15% of students.[27] **RAISE funds can be used to plug into any stage of MTSS implementation:**[28]

1. **Build a team** focused on creating and implementing an MTSS framework. This team could include administrators, teachers, parents, counselors, and interventionists, and **The RAISE Act could fund external consultants to support this work.**
2. **Collect data on the needs of students.** MTSS requires data on all students frequently, ideally three times a year. **The RAISE Act could support this data collection, or fund a specialist to analyze the data.**
   - Academic Data: ACAP results, ACT data, and CCR indicator achievement. It could also include average course grades, participation rates, and historical academic trends.
   - Behavioral Data: Frequency and severity of incident reports, as well as qualitative and quantitative teacher observations.
   - Engagement Data: Attendance and chronic absenteeism rates, tardiness rates, and participation levels in classroom activities and extracurricular activities.
   - Demographic Data: Socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic demographics, unique community groups, English language learner rates, and how many students with Individualized Education Plans a district or school serves.
   - Qualitative Data: Surveys and interviews from parents, teachers, and students.
3. **Develop high-quality Tier 1 instruction.** Aim for effective professional development for teachers, ongoing mentorship and coaching, high-quality instructional materials, and strong curriculum. **The RAISE Act could purchase those materials, or provide professional learning opportunities.**
4. **Provide targeted interventions** for students who aren't meeting benchmarks. Targeted, evidence-based interventions for students who need Tier 2 and Tier 3 support should be implemented quickly. **The RAISE Act could support tutors, coaches, or interventionists.**
5. **Monitor student performance to expand what's working, and change what isn't.**

Highlight: Piedmont City Schools, where over 70% of students are living in poverty, made huge gains in math through implementing a data-driven quick response system. Teachers used data to target instruction to meet student needs in real time, and students moved from 35th to 12th in the state in math proficiency between 2017 and 2022.[29]

Highlight: The Alabama Department of Education has encouraged Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a MTSS-type behavior management structure in schools. The guidebook they created shared practical and useful strategies for classroom management.

Strategy #4: Integrate Wraparound Supports

For students in poverty, many challenges are faced outside of school that can impact how students learn inside the classroom. Integrating academics with other services or supporting specific needs can be incredibly effective when health services, social supports, and family engagement are aligned.[30]

The following best practices can be modified to work for the students and communities each unique district serves. In some areas, one strategy may help students make incredible progress, whereas in other areas doing multiple services together may lead to more progress.

Districts could use RAISE funds to:

- Pilot a community school,[31] which are schools that act as neighborhood hubs. They partner with local organizations to provide academics, health care, social services, and youth development.
  - → Effective for students in poverty and other RAISE Act subgroups, including English learners and students with disabilities.[32]
- Create targeted partnerships with local community groups to support the needs of students and families.
- Support whole-child initiatives in schools to provide physical and mental health supports and social services for students and families.
- Provide school-based mental health services, such as Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Trauma or Bounce Back, to support students who are struggling.
  - → Train teachers and staff at the district level on Mental Health First Aid, through the Alabama Department of Mental Health. This is an 8-hour program that teaches people how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of crisis.

Highlight: Florence City Schools has partnered with the Riverbend Center for Mental Health for almost 30 years. The partnership has regular collaborative meetings on how to best support students.

Highlight: The Spring Valley School embedded a 20-minute advisory period into each school day for students to meet with a faculty member in small groups of 4-6 students. This time is used for connecting, identifying student needs, and tracking grades.

Highlight: Start the Adventure in Reading (STAIR) is a nonprofit organization in Birmingham. STAIR partners with 14 Birmingham City Schools to provide tutoring and family resources.

Strategy #5: Meaningfully Engage Families

When schools work together with parents to support student learning, students flourish. Schools that create strong family engagement are ten times more likely to improve student learning outcomes. All students are more likely to attend school regularly, get higher grades, score higher on state tests, and graduate from high school.

Districts could use RAISE funds to engage families:

- Provide training and tools to parents to support literacy and math, as well as other subjects, at home.
  - → Sending materials home and providing workshops for parents about what at-home support could look like has been proven to improve student outcomes in reading and math.[33]
- Support community lending libraries or providing reading materials for families.

  Research shows in-home skill-building and literacy supports are proven to be important for all children, including those living in poverty.[34]
- Offer school events designed to cultivate parents as partners in their children's education.
- Send home newsletters or a formal Family Engagement Guide[35] to provide explicit opportunities for parents to engage with schools.
- Build a Parents Association or board, where families can formally communicate with school and district leadership.

Highlight: Bessemer City Schools created a Parental and Family Program, where families engage in annual meetings, workshops, and academic nights.

Highlight: Booker T. Washington K-8, in Birmingham City Schools, incentivizes parents to work with their students on the previous week's Tier 1 lessons at home by providing gift cards to those who participate.

What does meaningful family engagement look like?

- ☑ Families are viewed as assets.
  - → It is critical that parents and families, and their input, are valued. Trust is the most important ingredient in family-school partnerships and it is built by feeling valued and having input taken into account.
- ☑ Communication is frequent and goes both ways.
  - → Parents and families are communicated with on a regular basis, including updates on homework and grades. Parents know how to contact their child's teachers and feel comfortable communicating with them.
- ☑ Families should be consulted on a regular basis for their input and feedback.
- ☑ Use virtual communication tools.
  - → Virtual tools allow families to communicate more often with teachers and allow more flexibility in scheduling meetings. Researchers have found that texting can be an effective way to communicate the importance of attendance to parents and families, which can lead to stronger student attendance.



The Local Budget Process

The RAISE Act sends funds to school districts called Local Education Agencies, or LEAs, for student needs. From there, money flows to schools, classrooms, and students. These funds support student needs above and beyond the Foundation Program, which is still the main vehicle Alabama uses to fund schools. RAISE funds are flexible, but must be budgeted, so understanding your local budget process is important.

Local Budgeting and Planning Requirements

- ☑ *Each year, Alabama LEAs are required to develop and adopt an annual budget (AL Code § 16-13-140).*
  - Annual LEA budgets must include RAISE Act funds. Since budgets need to reflect all available funding, this includes the additional money allocated for targeted student groups.
  - Budgets must include staffing and operating expenses by category (e.g., instructional materials, maintenance) for each school.
  - LEAs are required to hold two public information sessions before the final budget adoption on October 1.
- ☑ *All funds received from the RAISE Act Fund must be used to serve the student groups that generated them (AL Code § 16-13-362).*
  - RAISE funds are based on the number of students in each of the five targeted groups that the LEA serves.
  - LEAs may shift RAISE Act funds across student groups to meet local needs, but per state guidance, must obtain State Superintendent approval if reallocating 10% or more. Funds are not eligible for carryover.
- ☑ *Each LEA must produce an accountability plan and report by November 1 of each year, starting in 2026 (AL Code § 16-13-365).*
  - These reports must include goals and proposed expenditures for each of the five targeted student groups.
  - Starting in 2027, the reports must also include an analysis of prior-year progress for those student groups.

Budgeting and Planning Timeline

1 MARCH–JUNE: SPRING PLANNING

LEA Requirements And Actions

- Begin LEA planning and gather relevant input and data on students needs, LEA priorities, and budget conditions
- Consult RAISE Act Guide, issued **June 1**, to understand allocations, allowable uses, and planning requirements

How Advocates Can Engage

- Meet with district leadership to share priorities and input
- Advocate for inclusive stakeholder engagement strategies

2 JULY–AUGUST: BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

LEA Requirements And Actions

- Submit budget requests to LEA finance office
- Finalize revenue projections
- Complete budget presentations using ALSDE guidance

How Advocates Can Engage

- Provide input on how RAISE Act funds are allocated and prioritized
- Advocate for evidence-based strategies aligned to targeted student groups

3 SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER: PUBLIC BUDGET REVIEW AND SUBMISSION

LEA Requirements And Actions

- Hold two public hearings on proposed budget
- Conduct 20-day ADM data collection (start of school year)
- Submit budget to ALSDE by **Sept. 15**
- Fiscal year begins **Oct. 1**

How Advocates Can Engage

- Testify at public hearings to influence budget decisions
- Advocate for transparent use of RAISE funds aligned to student needs

4 NOVEMBER: ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTS

LEA Requirements And Actions

- Complete RAISE Act annual accountability plan and report by **Nov. 1**, which must include goals, strategies, spending, and outcomes

How Advocates Can Engage

- Advocate for clear goals, metrics, and transparency in accountability plans
- Review how impact and outcomes will be measured

ONGOING

LEA Requirements And Actions

- Implement RAISE Act-funded strategies
- Monitor budget against actual expenditures
- Track program implementation and progress

How Advocates Can Engage

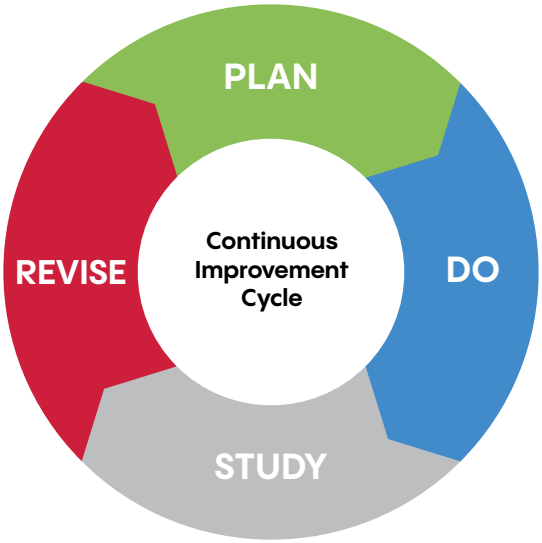
- Monitor implementation, spending, and progress toward goals
- Share feedback and recommend course corrections based on data

What's Next for District Leaders?

LEAs and district leaders have an opportunity to allocate RAISE Act funds to improve outcomes for students. Families, community members, teachers, and students should be meaningfully involved. This involvement could look like:

- Conduct surveys and interviews, hold town halls, and create other outreach opportunities.
- Publish board meeting schedules and minutes, and share the public hearing process.
- Share the budget plan and justification of program spending.
- Publish a plan for how RAISE funds will be used, and how they are intended to improve outcomes.
- Share information through newsletters, PTA meetings, school and district websites, events, and board meetings.

Continuous Improvement Cycles can help track the implementation of programs funded by the RAISE Act through a Plan-Do-Study-Revise model.



PLAN

- Identify RAISE funding levels, and which students are supported.
- Explore the needs and challenges of each student group.
- Consider schoolwide and targeted strategies.
- Choose the strategy or strategies to fund.

DO

- Fund the strategies that will support students.
- Implement the strategy by reallocating funding, staff, time, and supports so schools have what they need.
- Troubleshoot during the year if needed.

STUDY

- Collect academic outcome data, survey stakeholders, and observe.
- Determine how effective the strategy was for students supported by RAISE.
- Use data to identify strengths, gaps, and early signs of progress.

REVISE

- Expand effective strategies that show evidence of improving outcomes for students.
- Adjust, redesign, or shift away from less successful approaches, reallocating resources to support continuous improvement over time.

What's Next for Advocates?

Step 1: Get informed.

- Look at your LEA's budget from previous years to see where RAISE dollars are being spent.
- Review the LEA's RAISE Accountability Plan, which will first be submitted in the fall of 2026.
- Check out your LEA's website for information on new programs for the student groups identified through RAISE.

Step 2: Get Inspired.



- Read through the RAISE Act Implementation Toolkit to learn about best practices and possible options for spending RAISE funds.
- Each LEA receives different levels of funds, based specifically on the students they serve. Consider what your community wants and needs based on your specific district.

Step 3: Get Active.

- Respond to any surveys or public requests for comment by your district or your school.
- Call or email your local superintendent or other district administrator with your ideas on how to spend RAISE dollars.
- Speak with your principal or school leader about new programs your child could participate in.
- Review upcoming school board agendas found on each district's website, and attend when budget discussions are being prioritized.
- Participate in meetings and public hearings where the budget is discussed. These are usually part of August or early September school board meetings.

Ask questions like:

- How much RAISE Act funding does the district expect to receive for each of the five targeted student groups?
- How will the district decide which programs or schools will receive RAISE Act funds?
- How does the district plan to use RAISE Act funding for specific groups of students (e.g., additional staff, new programs, expanded services)?
- How will the district measure whether those investments improve outcomes for the students the funding is intended to support?

Share this resource with other families and district leaders.

Endnotes

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