

# MISSISSIPPI



*Mississippi includes high-achieving students in its growth model but does little else to encourage schools to pay attention to them.*

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

The Every Student Succeeds Act grants states more authority over their school accountability systems than its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Consequently, states now have an opportunity to design school rating systems that improve upon the NCLB model, especially when it comes to high achievers.

NCLB meant well (as did many state accountability systems that preceded it), but it had a pernicious flaw. Namely, it created strong incentives for schools to focus all their energy on helping low-performing students get over a modest “proficiency” bar, while ignoring the educational needs of their high achievers, who were likely to pass state reading and math tests regardless of what happened in the classroom. This may be why the United States has seen significant achievement growth for its lowest-performing students over the last twenty years but smaller gains for its top students.

Starting in 2011, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered waivers to states that wanted the flexibility to redesign their accountability systems. In particular, states were allowed to incorporate the use of real student growth measures into their school determinations. This was important for a variety of reasons. First, growth measures more accurately evaluate schools' impact on student achievement than proficiency rates, which are strongly correlated with student demographics, family circumstance, and prior achievement. But just as significantly, well-designed growth measures can eliminate the temptation for schools to ignore their high achievers.

ESSA maintains NCLB's requirement that states assess students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school, as well as the mandate that states adopt accountability systems that lead to ratings for schools. These systems must include four types of indicators: academic achievement; another academic indicator, which can include student growth for elementary and middle schools; growth towards English proficiency for English language learners; and at least one other valid, reliable indicator of school quality or student success. Each of the academic indicators (1–3) must carry “substantial” weight and, in the aggregate, must count “much more” than the fourth.

Here we examine whether Mississippi's accountability system prioritizes high achievers. We specifically evaluate the state's system for rating school performance during the 2013-2014 school year—the most recent year for which information is available. We do not examine the quality of Mississippi's standards, tests, or sanctions for low performance.

This analysis also illustrates how states can seize the opportunity under ESSA to redesign their accountability systems and prioritize high achievers.

This last point is especially important because many state accountability systems are currently in flux. In part, that's because of recent changes allowed by ESEA waivers, as well as the coming changes driven by ESSA implementation. But it's also because states across the country recently moved to new, tougher assessments linked to their new, tougher standards.

States may think we're being premature in evaluating their systems during this time of massive change. Please understand that our primary objective is to identify the design features of an accountability system that works for all students—which we hope will become the prevailing model now that ESEA is reauthorized and states' testing regimes are becoming stable once again.

Our focus here is on rating systems for elementary and middle schools. A separate analysis will examine the same issues for high school accountability.

## HOW STATES CAN PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS IN THEIR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

In our view, states can and should take four steps to ensure that the needs of high achievers are prioritized under ESSA:

1. **For the first academic indicator required by ESSA (“academic achievement”), give schools incentives for getting more students to an “advanced” level.** Under ESSA, states will continue to track the percentage of students who attain proficiency on state tests. They should also give schools incentives for getting students to an advanced level (such as level four on Smarter Balanced or level five on PARCC). For example, they might create an achievement index that gives schools partial credit for getting students to “basic,” full credit for getting students to “proficient,” and additional credit for getting students to “advanced.” (It's not entirely clear from the Department of Education's proposed regulations whether this will be allowed, though we don't see anything in the law prohibiting it.)
2. **For the second academic indicator expected by ESSA (student growth), rate schools using a “true growth model,” i.e., one that looks at the progress of individual students at all achievement levels and not just those who are low-performing or below the “proficient” line.** Regrettably, some states still don't consider individual student growth, or else they use a “growth-to-proficiency system” that continues to encourage schools to ignore the needs of students above (or far above) the proficient level. Using true growth models—such as “value added” or the “growth percentile method”—for all students is much preferred.

3. **Include “gifted students” (or “high achieving students”) as a subgroup in the state’s accountability system and report results for them separately.** States can signal that high achievers matter by making them a visible, trackable “subgroup,” akin to special education students or English language learners, and publishing school ratings for their progress and/or achievement. (Obviously, it makes little sense to simply report that high achievers are high-achieving. But whether they are making strong growth is quite relevant. Alternatively, states might publish results for students labeled as “gifted,” though that opens up a can of worms about how that label is applied.)
  
4. **When determining summative school ratings, make growth—across the achievement spectrum—count the most.** Finally, the Department of Education’s proposed regulations require states to combine multiple factors into summative school ratings, probably through an index. Each of the three academic indicators (achievement, growth, and progress toward English proficiency) must carry “substantial” weight. But in our view, states should (and, under ESSA, are free to) make growth matter the most (50 percent or more of a school’s total score). Otherwise, schools will continue to face an incentive to ignore their high-performers. (States that don’t combine their indicators into a summative school rating receive a “Not Applicable” here.)

### DOES MISSISSIPPI’S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM PRIORITIZE HIGH ACHIEVERS?





INDICATOR	RATINGS	NOTES
1. Does the state rate schools’ “academic achievement” using a model that gives additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level?		Mississippi does not give additional credit for students achieving at an “advanced” level. <sup>1</sup>
2. Does the state rate schools’ growth using a model that looks at the progress of all individual students, not just those below the “proficient” line?		Mississippi uses a categorical growth model. <sup>2</sup> A categorical growth model compares the performance-level categories that student fall into from one year to the next.
3. Does the state’s accountability system include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup and report their results separately?		Mississippi does not include “gifted students,” “high-achieving students,” or the like as a subgroup or report their results separately. (See Exhibit A.)
4. When calculating summative school ratings, does “growth for all students” count for at least half of the rating?		Growth counts for 57 percent of a school’s summative rating, but “growth for all students” counts for just 28.5 percent. (See Exhibit B.)

EXHIBIT A<sup>3</sup>

Grenada School District (2220)  
Grenada Middle School (2220012)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires each state to use a unified accountability model. School, district, and state report cards that contain the following accountability information must be produced and made available publicly.

No Child  
Left Behind  
2013-2014  
School  
Report Card



### Mississippi Statewide Accountability System

The Mississippi Statewide Accountability System (MSAS) is a single "A" through "F" school and district accountability system based on the requirements of Federal law under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Request and Mississippi Code 37-17-6. The MSAS assigns performance classifications based on 1) student achievement, 2) student growth, and 3) graduation, if applicable. For the 2013-2014 school year, the U. S. Department of Education granted Mississippi a one-year waiver from school performance classifications due to the implementation of Mississippi's College and Career Readiness Standards. The waiver allowed districts and schools to retain the letter grade received in the 2012-2013 school year if the 2013-2014 grade was lower as a result of assessment results.

	Current Year	Prior Year
Official Grade:	B	B
Without Waiver Grade:	D	**
4-Year Graduation Rate:	**	**

Notes: Only districts and schools serving grade 1 or higher or higher are eligible to receive a performance classification. The Without Waiver Grade only applies the 2013-2014 school year. Possible Accountability Status: A, B, C, D, F. (N/A – The school did not receive a performance classification due to not having available data.)

### ESEA Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)

A district or school is responsible for meeting annual measurable objectives (AMO) in three areas: Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and a third academic indicator referred to as the "Other Academic Indicator." The "Other Academic Indicator" for schools and districts without a grade 12 is the attendance rate. For schools and districts with a grade 12, the indicator is the graduation rate. If a district or school does not meet an AMO in any one of the three areas, the district or school is considered to have not met AMOs.

	Current Year	Prior Year
District AMO Status:	Not Met	Not Met
Reading/Language Arts Status:	Not Met	Not Met
Mathematics Status:	Not Met	Met
Other Academic Indicator Status:	Met	Met
Differentiated Accountability Label:	Not a Title I School	Not a Title I School

### AMO Subgroup Results

Student Groups	Reading/ Language Arts	Mathematics	Other Academic Indicator	Graduation Rate		Attendance Rate
				Current Year	Prior Year	
All Students:	Not Met	Not Met	Met	**	**	95
Students with IEPs:	Not Met	Not Met	**	**	**	**
Limited English Proficient:	**	**	**	**	**	**
Economically Disadvantaged:	Not Met	Not Met	**	**	**	**
Asian:	**	**	**	**	**	**
Black:	Not Met	Not Met	**	**	**	**
Hispanic:	**	**	**	**	**	**
Native American:	**	**	**	**	**	**
White:	Not Met	Not Met	**	**	**	**

EXHIBIT B<sup>4</sup>


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**Exhibit A: Components of a School's or District's Accountability Grade, as of 2013-2014 Assessment Year**

Components	Without 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	With 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
	700 Possible Points	900 Possible Points
Reading Proficiency	100	100
Reading Growth-All Students	100	100
Reading Growth-Low 25% of Students	100	100
Math Proficiency	100	100
Math Growth-All Students	100	100
Math Growth-Low 25% of Students	100	100
Science Proficiency	100	50
U.S. History Proficiency		50
Graduation Rate-All Students*		200

\*MDE uses a federally approved four-year graduation rate calculation (MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-17-6 [1972]). See page 26 of the report.

NOTE: MDE does not currently use "college and career readiness" and "acceleration" to calculate a school's or district's grade. However, according to MDE, these components will be included beginning with school year 2015-2016 results. See pages 52-53 of the report for more information on these components.

SOURCE: MDE.

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**Exhibit B: MDE Cut-Points for Schools and Districts, as of 2013-2014 Assessment Year**

Letter Grade	Cut-Point Range	
	Without 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	With 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
A	518 or higher	695 or higher
B	455-517	623-694
C	400-454	540-622
D	325-399	422-539
F	324 or lower	421 or lower

SOURCE: MDE.

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## ENDNOTES

1. "Report to the Mississippi Legislature: A Review of the Accountability Standards of the Mississippi Department of Education," Mississippi PEER Committee, pages 16–18, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.peer.state.ms.us/reports/rpt596.pdf>.
2. "Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2014," Mississippi Department of Education, page 28, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/accreditation-library/2014-mpsas-20140811.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.
3. "Grenada Middle School NCLB 2013–2014 Report Card," Mississippi Department of Education, page 15, accessed May 2, 2016, [http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/nclb\\_rc/2014/School/2220.pdf](http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/nclb_rc/2014/School/2220.pdf).
4. "Report to the Mississippi Legislature," page ix.