

# Updates From the Office of Accreditation

METIS Conference

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**Jo Ann Malone, Ed.D.**

Executive Director  
Office of Accreditation

## VISION

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To create a world-class educational system that gives students the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and the workforce, and to flourish as parents and citizens

## MISSION

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To provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community

1. All Students Proficient and Showing Growth in All Assessed Areas
2. Every Student Graduates From High School and is Ready for College and Career
3. Every Child Has Access to a High-Quality Early Childhood Program
4. Every School Has Effective Teachers and Leaders
5. Every Community Effectively Using a World-Class Data System to Improve Student Outcomes
6. Every School and District is Rated “C” or Higher

# Overview of Topics

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- Hot Topics and Friendly Reminders
- Major functions of the Office of Accreditation
- Review of Accreditation Process and Process Standards
- Improving the Process

# Hot Topics and Friendly Reminders

# 180 School Days – Process Standard 13.4

The school year is 180 days for all students including seniors. Seniors are allowed to be absent for graduation purposes not to exceed three (3) days. In preparing for the upcoming school year, districts should prepare graduation ceremonies in such a manner that graduating seniors are absent from classes for no more than three (3) days prior to the end of the school year.

(See Mississippi Code Ann. § 37-13-63)

# Weather-Related School Closures

- Mississippi Code Ann. § 37-13-63 requires school districts to operate no less than 180 days. However, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) developed guidelines in response to conflicting state laws concerning make-up days following school closures for inclement weather. In 2015, the MDE requested and received an opinion from the Attorney General's Office (attached), which states based on the authority granted in one statute, the Board can decide how districts are to make-up missed school days for weather emergencies, unless the local school board has given the district superintendent the authority to decide whether to make up missed days, as outlined in another statute (Mississippi Code Ann. § 37-13-64).

# Weather-Related School Closures

For districts without a policy granting the superintendent the authority, the MDE requires school districts to make-up each day of school missed, up to four days. If more than four days are missed, the district must make-up those days but have the option of adding a minimum of one hour of instructional time to existing school days rather than adding days to the calendar.

For districts with a policy granting discretion to the superintendent, the school district must provide, upon request, true and accurate, supporting documentation to the Office of Accreditation that the local school board has empowered the superintendent of their district with the authority to declare a weather emergency prior to the closure of any school or schools within the school district. That policy must have been in local board policy prior to any weather events in recent years.



# Non-Weather Related School Closures

While some districts have local policies granting the superintendent the authority to cancel school for reasons in addition to inclement weather, state statute only provides for the exemption to the 180-school day requirement for inclement weather emergencies. Therefore, if a district cancels school for reasons other than extreme weather conditions, the days may need to be made up.

When inquiring as to whether or not days that are not weather-related emergencies must be made up, superintendents should make decisions based on the best interest of the students. Immediate answers from MDE as to whether or not the days will have to be made up may not be available.

# Major Functions

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- To implement the State Accountability System and Performance-Based Accreditation System
- To continuously monitor and report compliance with accreditation standards [See Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6(7) and Accreditation Policy 5.0]
  - 144 Public School Districts
  - 4 SBE Governed Schools
  - Nonpublic and State Agency Schools

# Major Functions

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- Serve as Staff for the Commission on School Accreditation
- Publish Regulations: *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, Non-Public School Accountability Standards, Standards for SBE Governed Schools, Manual for Cumulative Folder & Permanent Records*
- Monitor Compliance with Accreditation Standards and Report to the Commission on School Accreditation and State Board of Education
- Report to the Commission on School Accreditation and State Board of Education the degree of compliance
- Provide Technical Assistance to board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, legislators, and general public

# Resources

- Regulatory office within the Mississippi Department of Education
- Primary responsibility is administering the state's performance-based accountability system for public school districts and nonpublic schools seeking accreditation
- Public School Accreditation: Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6
- Non-Public School Accreditation: Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-7  
Operates under the umbrella of the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Commission on School Accreditation (CSA)

# Resources

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- Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6
- *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2018*
- Accountability Resource Manual  
<https://districtaccess.mde.k12.ms.us/Accreditation/Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>
- *MS Cumulative Folders and Permanent Records Manual*  
<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/accred>
- *How to Complete the Mississippi Cumulative Folder and Permanent Record Tutorials* <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/accred>

# MS Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2018

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- Federal Laws
- State Laws
- State Board of Education Policies
- Commission on School Accreditation Policies and Standards
- <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/accreditation>

# Why Accreditation?

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- Ensures Quality and Consistency
- The school district and individual schools meet a set of established educational standards
- Transfer of Carnegie Unit Credits
- Enrollment in Post-Secondary Programs
- Eligibility for Athletic Programs
- Employment



# Accreditation Monitoring

The Office of Accreditation fulfills the objectives and duties through a number of processes:

- Conducting public school audits;
  - Comprehensive on-site audits
  - Investigative, unannounced audits
  - Test security audits
- Analyzing annual reports submitted to the MDE; and
- Reviewing reports from other state or federal program offices.

# Legislative Audits

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The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), through the Office of District Accreditation, was directed by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2012 session to implement the provisions of Miss. Code Ann. §37-17-6 and the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.

# Legislative Audits (con't)

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- The MDE, through the Office of Accreditation, was directed by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2012 session to implement the provisions of Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6 and the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
- Beginning with school year 2012-2013 the Office of Accreditation began receiving appropriations to conduct random, unannounced audits.
- Auditors/evaluators were trained.
- Over 100 audits have been conducted in the past 6 years.

# Consistently Find

- Accreditation Policy 2.1 – Reporting Information (Personnel)
- School Board Policies
- Number of Issues Regarding Superintendent/School Board Relations
- Process Standards
  - Std 6 – Enrollment requirements
  - Std 8 – Student Records
  - Std 14 – Graduation Requirements
  - Std 18 – Libraries
  - Std 20 – Instructional Management
  - Std 29 – Pupil Transportation
  - Std 30 – Facilities
  - Std 31 – School Safety

# Accreditation Process

# 2.1 Assignment of District Accreditation Statuses

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The Commission on School Accreditation determines the annual accreditation status of all public school districts in the fall of each school year based on verified accreditation data from the previous school year. An annual district accreditation status is assigned based on compliance with Process Standards. Information concerning district compliance with Process Standards is reported to the Commission on an annual basis. (See Policy 2.2.)

## Policy 2.1 (con't)

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The district superintendent and school principals are responsible for ensuring that all data reported to the Mississippi Department of Education are true and accurate as verified by supporting documentation on file in the school district. **Reporting false information is a violation of the accreditation requirements set forth by the State Board of Education and is one of the violations that may result in the immediate downgrading of the district's accreditation status.**

## 2.2 Process Standards

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Process standards address accepted educational principles and practices that are believed to promote educational quality. These include the basic operation of the school, including school board policies, state and federal laws for educational programs, staffing, resources, facilities, and instructional management.



## Policy 2.2 (con't)

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Any verified violation of a Process Standard is noted on the record of a school district at the time of discovery within any school year, but does not affect the current accreditation status of the district. (See Policy 2.5 for the exceptions.) If a noted violation of a Process Standard has not been corrected by the following school year when accreditation statuses are assigned, the violation is reported to the Commission for appropriate action.

## 2.3 Annual Accreditation Statuses

In the fall of each year, every public school district will be assigned an annual accreditation status based on compliance with Process Standards and Accreditation Policies.

**ACCREDITED** is assigned to a district that complies with Accreditation Policies and 100% of the Process Standards. (See exceptions in Appendices F and H.)

**PROBATION** is assigned to a district that complies with fewer than 100% of the Accreditation Policies and Process Standards. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

**WITHDRAWN** is assigned to a district that has previously been assigned a PROBATION status and still does not comply with its Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Any school district placed in conservatorship may have its accreditation withdrawn. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

# 2.5 District Accreditation Policy

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the public school district level. School districts are held accountable for Accreditation Policies and Process Standards and receive an annual accreditation status. Standards of the performance-based accreditation system recommended by the Commission and adopted by the State Board of Education are contained in the current edition of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*.

# Accreditation Policy 2.5.1

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Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to **Probation**.

- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information,
- Standard 1.1 and 1.3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 1.2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet
- state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations,
- Standards 4 and 5, failure to comply with financial accountability
- requirements,
- Standard 14, failure to comply with graduation requirements,

# Accreditation Policy 2.5.1 (con't)

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- Standard 16, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System,
- Standards 17.1-17.8, failure to comply with state/federal regulations, or
- Standards 29, 30, and 31, failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

# Accreditation Policy 2.5.2

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include **withdrawal** of the district's accreditation.

- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information
- Standard 1.1 and 1.3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 1.2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations,
- Standards 4 and 5, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements of a serious nature,
- Standard 14, failure to comply with graduation requirements specified in Standards 14.1, 14.2, and 14.5,

# Accreditation Policy 2.5.2 (con't)

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- Standard 16, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System in Appendix F, numbers 8 and 9,
- Standards 17.4-17.6, federal programs whose regulations call for strong sanctions for continued patterns of noncompliance, or
- Standards 29, 30, and 31, failure to comply with standards that pose life-threatening conditions for students and staff.

# Accreditation Policy 2.9

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## 2.9.1 Declaration of State of Emergency

The State Board of Education may request the Governor to declare a state of emergency in any school district when **any** of the following emergency situations occur. Upon the declaration of the state of emergency by the Governor, the State Board of Education may take all such action for dealing with the school districts as authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6, including the withdrawal of the district's accreditation.



# Accreditation Policy 2.9 (con't)

## 2.9.1.1 Emergency Situation

The State Board of Education and the Commission on School Accreditation determine that an extreme emergency situation exists in a school district which jeopardizes the safety, security, **or** educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in that district, and such emergency situation is believed to be related to a serious violation or violations of accreditation standards or state or federal law. For purposes of this paragraph, the declarations of a state of emergency shall not be limited to those instances when a school district's impairments are related to a lack of financial resources, but also shall include serious failure to meet minimum academic standards, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor student performance. {Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6(11)(b)}

# Accreditation Policy 2.9 (con't)

## 2.9.1.2 Failing School District

A school district meets the State Board of Education's definition of a failing school district for two (2) consecutive full school years. {Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6(11)(b)}

## 2.9.1.3 Schools At-Risk

A school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, or in the event that more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk in any one (1) year. {Miss. Code Ann. § 37-18-7(2)} (See Policy 3.4.1 for Schools At-Risk designation.)

# Accreditation Policy 2.9 (con't)

Policy 2.9.2 will become effective one (1) calendar year following the Withdrawal of Accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation and the State Board of Education. **The withdrawal of a school district's accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation will result in the following:**

- A school or schools within a district shall be limited to participation in no more than fifty percent (50%) of the regular season of any interscholastic activity, which shall include division/district/regional games,
- The interscholastic season schedule for a school or schools within a district shall not include the opening day of season or any type of post season participation, as determined by the Office of District Accreditation, and
- Cheerleading, drill and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music, and band may participate in district or state contest, but shall not be eligible to receive ratings.

# Performance Classification Policy 3.0

- The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the individual public school level and district level. Individual schools and districts are held accountable for 1) student achievement, 2) student growth, and 3) graduation, if applicable, and receive an annual School Performance Classification and District Performance Classification.
- When the district establishes a new school and/or the **district reconfigures** the specific grades or students assigned to an existing school(s) within the district, the student achievement data used to assign school performance classifications will follow the guidelines established in the School Performance Standards and School Performance Model.

# Process Standards

# Process Standards

- Administration & Personnel
- School Board Policies
- Training and Qualifications
- Licensed Professional Staff
- Financial Accountability
- School Operations
- Student Records
- Instructional Time
- Graduation Requirements
- State and Federal Programs
- Instructional Practices
- Required Curriculum
- Student Teacher Ratios
- Safe and Orderly Schools

# Improving the Process

# Questions and Suggestions?

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- Funding cuts
- Electronic submissions
- Assurance statements
- Pilot districts





MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

Ensuring a bright *future* for every child

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# Jo Ann Malone, Ed.D.

Executive Director,  
Office of Accreditation

[JMalone@mdek12.org](mailto:JMalone@mdek12.org)

601-359-3764