

**OFFICE OF CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER**  
**Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items**  
**June 19, 2025**

**MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL OF THE ARTS**

- AG. Approval of the Engagement Letters between the Mississippi School of the Arts and the Lowery, Payn, and Leggett Accounting Firm for audit services

**Executive Summary**

The document contains the Engagement Letters between the Mississippi School of the Arts (MSA) and the Lowery, Payn, and Leggett to provide audit services for prior years – FY2022 and 2023 – financial audit.

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached



## LOWERY, PAYN, LEGGETT & BELLIPANNI

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

207 South Railroad Ave.  
Brookhaven, Mississippi 39601  
PHONE (601) 833-1456  
FAX (601) 833-9896

*Members of:*  
*Mississippi Society of CPAs*  
*American Institute of CPAs*

May 16, 2024

To the Board of Directors and Management

Mississippi School of the Arts  
308 West Cherokee Street  
Brookhaven, Mississippi 39601

We are pleased to confirm our understanding of the services we are to provide Mississippi School of the Arts for the year ended June 30, 2022.

### **Audit Scope and Objectives**

We will audit the financial statements of the governmental activities, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information, and the disclosures, which collectively comprise the basic financial statements of Mississippi School of the Arts as of and for the year ended June 30, 2022. Accounting standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAP) provide for certain required supplementary information (RSI), such as management's discussion and analysis (MD&A), to supplement Mississippi School of the Arts' basic financial statements. Such information, although not a part of the basic financial statements, is required by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board who considers it to be an essential part of financial reporting for placing the basic financial statements in an appropriate operational, economic, or historical context. As part of our engagement, we will apply certain limited procedures to Mississippi School of the Arts' RSI in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS). These limited procedures will consist of inquiries of management regarding the methods of preparing the information and comparing the information for consistency with management's responses to our inquiries, the basic financial statements, and other knowledge we obtained during our audit of the basic financial statements. We will not express an opinion or provide any assurance on the information because the limited procedures do not provide us with sufficient appropriate evidence to express an opinion or provide any assurance. The following RSI is required by GAAP and will be subjected to certain limited procedures, but will not be audited:

- 1) Management's Discussion and Analysis
- 2) Budgetary Comparison Schedules
- 3) Schedule of the School's Proportionate Share of the Net Pension Liability
- 4) Schedule of Employer Contributions – PERS
- 5) Schedule of the School's Proportionate Share of the Net OPEB Liability

## 6) Schedule of Employers Contributions – OPEB

We have also been engaged to report on supplementary information other than RSI that accompanies Mississippi School of the Arts' financial statements. We will subject the following supplementary information to the auditing procedures applied in our audit of the financial statements and certain additional procedures, including comparing and reconciling such information directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the financial statements or to the financial statements themselves, and other additional procedures in accordance with GAAS, and we will provide an opinion on it in relation to the financial statements as a whole in a report combined with our auditor's report on the financial statements:

- 1) Schedule of State/Federal Financial Assistance
- 2) Schedule of Instructional, Administrative, and Other Expenditures

The objectives of our audit are to obtain reasonable assurance as to whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion about whether your financial statements are fairly presented, in all material respects, in conformity with GAAP; and report on the fairness of the supplementary information referred to in the second paragraph when considered in relation to the financial statements as a whole. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with GAAS will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements, including omissions, can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgment of a reasonable user made based on the financial statements.

### **Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements**

We will conduct our audit in accordance with GAAS and will include tests of your accounting records and other procedures we consider necessary to enable us to express such opinions. As part of an audit in accordance with GAAS, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.

We will evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management. We will also evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and determine whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation. We will plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement, whether from (1) errors, (2) fraudulent financial reporting, (3) misappropriation of assets, or (4) violations of laws or governmental regulations that are attributable to the government or to acts by management or employees acting on behalf of the government.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, combined with the inherent limitations of internal control, and because we will not perform a detailed examination of all transactions, there is an unavoidable risk that some material misstatements may not be detected by us, even though the audit is properly planned and performed in accordance with GAAS. In addition, an audit is not designed to detect immaterial misstatements or violations of laws or governmental regulations that

do not have a direct and material effect on the financial statements. However, we will inform the appropriate level of management of any material errors, fraudulent financial reporting, or misappropriation of assets that comes to our attention. We will also inform the appropriate level of management of any violations of laws or governmental regulations that come to our attention, unless clearly inconsequential. Our responsibility as auditors is limited to the period covered by our audit and does not extend to any later periods for which we are not engaged as auditors.

We will also conclude, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the government's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

Our procedures will include tests of documentary evidence supporting the transactions recorded in the accounts, and direct confirmation of receivables and certain assets and liabilities by correspondence with selected customers, creditors, and financial institutions. We will also request written representations from your attorneys as part of the engagement.

Our audit of the financial statements does not relieve you of your responsibilities.

### **Audit Procedures—Internal Control**

We will obtain an understanding of the government and its environment, including the system of internal control, sufficient to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to error or fraud, and to design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks and obtain evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinions. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentation, or the override of internal control. An audit is not designed to provide assurance on internal control or to identify deficiencies in internal control. Accordingly, we will express no such opinion. However, during the audit, we will communicate to management and those charged with governance internal control related matters that are required to be communicated under AICPA professional standards.

We have identified the following significant risk of material misstatement as part of our audit planning:

- The risk of management override of controls

### **Audit Procedures—Compliance**

As part of obtaining reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement, we will perform tests of Mississippi School of the Arts's compliance with the provisions of applicable laws, regulations, contracts, and agreements. However, the objective of our audit will not be to provide an opinion on overall compliance and we will not express such an opinion.

### **Other Services**

We will also prepare the financial statements of Mississippi School of the Arts in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America based on information provided by you.

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We will perform the services in accordance with applicable professional standards. The other services are limited to the financial statement services previously defined. We, in our sole professional judgment, reserve the right to refuse to perform any procedure or take any action that could be construed as assuming management responsibilities.

You agree to assume all management responsibilities for the financial statement preparation services and any other nonattest services we provide; oversee the services by designating an individual, preferably from senior management, with suitable skill, knowledge, or experience; evaluate the adequacy and results of the services; and accept responsibility for them.

### **Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statements**

Our audit will be conducted on the basis that you acknowledge and understand your responsibility for designing, implementing, and maintaining internal controls relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, including monitoring ongoing activities; for the selection and application of accounting principles; and for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America with the oversight of those charged with governance.

Management is responsible for making drafts of financial statements, all financial records, and related information available to us and for the accuracy and completeness of that information (including information from outside of the general and subsidiary ledgers). You are also responsible for providing us with (1) access to all information of which you are aware that is relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements, such as records, documentation, identification of all related parties and all related-party relationships and transactions, and other matters; (2) additional information that we may request for the purpose of the audit; and (3) unrestricted access to persons within the government from whom we determine it necessary to obtain audit evidence. At the conclusion of our audit, we will require certain written representations from you about the financial statements and related matters.

Your responsibilities include adjusting the financial statements to correct material misstatements and confirming to us in the management representation letter that the effects of any uncorrected misstatements aggregated by us during the current engagement and pertaining to the latest period presented are immaterial, both individually and in the aggregate, to the financial statements of each opinion unit taken as a whole.

You are responsible for the design and implementation of programs and controls to prevent and detect fraud, and for informing us about all known or suspected fraud affecting the government involving (1) management, (2) employees who have significant roles in internal control, and (3) others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements. Your responsibilities include informing us of your knowledge of any allegations of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the government received in communications from employees, former employees, grantors, regulators, or others. In addition, you are responsible for identifying and ensuring that the government complies with applicable laws and regulations.

You are responsible for the preparation of the supplementary information in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAP). You agree to include our report on the supplementary information in any document that contains, and indicates

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that we have reported on, the supplementary information. You also agree to make the audited financial statements readily available to users of the supplementary information no later than the date the supplementary information is issued with our report thereon. Your responsibilities include acknowledging to us in the representation letter that (1) you are responsible for presentation of the supplementary information in accordance with GAAP; (2) you believe the supplementary information, including its form and content, is fairly presented in accordance with GAAP; (3) the methods of measurement or presentation have not changed from those used in the prior period (or, if they have changed, the reasons for such changes); and (4) you have disclosed to us any significant assumptions or interpretations underlying the measurement or presentation of the supplementary information.

### **Engagement Administration, Fees, and Other**

We understand that your employees will prepare all cash, accounts receivable, or other confirmations we request and will locate any documents selected by us for testing.

The audit documentation for this engagement is the property of Lowery, Payn, Leggett and Bellipanni, CPAs and constitutes confidential information. However, subject to applicable laws and regulations, audit documentation and appropriate individuals will be made available upon request and in a timely manner to the Mississippi Board of Education or its designee. We will notify you of any such request. If requested, access to such audit documentation will be provided under the supervision of Lowery, Payn, Leggett and Bellipanni, CPAs personnel. Furthermore, upon request, we may provide copies of selected audit documentation to the Mississippi Board of Education or its designee. The Mississippi Board of Education or its designee may intend or decide to distribute the copies or information contained therein to others, including other governmental agencies.

Sharon Payn is the engagement partner and is responsible for supervising the engagement and signing the report or authorizing another individual to sign it.

Our fee for services will be \$12,000. The above fee is based on anticipated cooperation from your personnel and the assumption that unexpected circumstances will not be encountered during the audit. If significant additional time is necessary, we will discuss it with you and arrive at a new fee estimate before we incur the additional costs.

### **Reporting**

We will issue a written report upon completion of our audit of Mississippi School of the Arts's financial statements. Our report will be addressed to the board of directors of Mississippi School of the Arts. Circumstances may arise in which our report may differ from its expected form and content based on the results of our audit. Depending on the nature of these circumstances, it may be necessary for us to modify our opinions, add a separate section, or add an emphasis-of-matter or other-matter paragraph to our auditor's report, or if necessary, withdraw from this engagement. If our opinions are other than unmodified, we will discuss the reasons with you in advance. If, for any reason, we are unable to complete the audit or are unable to form or have not formed opinions, we may decline to express opinions or withdraw from this engagement.

**LOWERY, PAYN, LEGGETT & BELLIPANNI**

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We appreciate the opportunity to be of service to Mississippi School of the Arts and believe this letter accurately summarizes the significant terms of our engagement. If you have any questions, please let us know. If you agree with the terms of our engagement as described in this letter, please sign the attached copy and return it to us.

Very truly yours,

*Lowery, Payn, Leggett & Bellipanni, CPAs*

Lowery, Payn, Leggett & Bellipanni, CPAs

RESPONSE:

This letter correctly sets forth the understanding of Mississippi School of the Arts.

Management signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Governance signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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May 16, 2024

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Management is responsible for making drafts of financial statements, all financial records, and related information available to us and for the accuracy and completeness of that information (including information from outside of the general and subsidiary ledgers). You are also responsible for providing us with (1) access to all information of which you are aware that is relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements, such as records, documentation, identification of all related parties and all related-party relationships and transactions, and other matters; (2) additional information that we may request for the purpose of the audit; and (3) unrestricted access to persons within the government from whom we determine it necessary to obtain audit evidence. At the conclusion of our audit, we will require certain written representations from you about the financial statements and related matters.

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that we have reported on, the supplementary information. You also agree to make the audited financial statements readily available to users of the supplementary information no later than the date the supplementary information is issued with our report thereon. Your responsibilities include acknowledging to us in the representation letter that (1) you are responsible for presentation of the supplementary information in accordance with GAAP; (2) you believe the supplementary information, including its form and content, is fairly presented in accordance with GAAP; (3) the methods of measurement or presentation have not changed from those used in the prior period (or, if they have changed, the reasons for such changes); and (4) you have disclosed to us any significant assumptions or interpretations underlying the measurement or presentation of the supplementary information.

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Very truly yours,

*Lowery, Payn, Leggett & Bellipanni, CPAs*

Lowery, Payn, Leggett & Bellipanni, CPAs

RESPONSE:

This letter correctly sets forth the understanding of Mississippi School of the Arts.

Management signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Governance signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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