

Minutes of Mississippi Board of Education Meeting

December 18, 2025

The members of the Mississippi Board of Education met at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 18, 2025, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 25-41-5 for the purpose of conducting a regularly scheduled Board meeting.

The public accessed this meeting via livestream or in-person at the Central High School Building, 4th Floor Boardroom, 359 North West Street, Jackson, Mississippi. Board members physically present included: Dr. Wendi Barrett, Mr. Glen V. East, Mr. Bill Jacobs, Mr. Matt Mayo, Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee, Mr. Matt Miller, Mr. Mike Pruitt, Ms. Billye Jean Stroud, and Ms. Mary Werner. Student Representatives present: Mr. Crosby Parker and Ms. Michelle Xie. Dr. Lance Evans, State Superintendent, was also present.

- I. Mr. Matt Miller called the Board meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., after determining that a quorum of the Board existed for the purpose of conducting a meeting.
- II. Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee led the Pledge of Allegiance and Ms. Billye Jean Stroud gave the Invocation.
- III. On a motion by Ms. Mary Werner, seconded by Mr. Glen V. East, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of November 20, 2025, Board meeting.
- IV. On a motion by Mr. Bill Jacobs, seconded by Mr. Mike Pruitt, the Board approved to move the Consent Agenda Tab K – Approval of the updated Internal Audit Charter to the regular agenda as Tab 07.

On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee, the Board approved the agenda as amended.

- V. Recognition Ceremony

2025 Mississippi Blue Ribbon Schools

Bayou View Elementary School
Gulfport School District

Beach Elementary School
Pascagoula-Gautier School District

Ocean Springs High School
Ocean Springs School District

VI. Dr. Lance Evans gave the following report as the State Superintendent of Education:

- He met with the House Education Committee Vice-Chair Kent McCarty, House Speaker Policy Advisor Chole Butler, and the House attorney to discuss MDE's priorities for the 2026 Legislative session. He also met with Senator Nicole Boyd.
- He and Ms. Holly Spivey met with Commissioner Sean Tindell yesterday about the Driver's Education bill.
- He met with leaders of Mississippi First about the organization's priorities and how it can support MDE initiatives. He stated that Mississippi First is a strong supporter of early childhood education.
- He met with the head of Delta Streets Academy about opportunities to support students in failing schools in the Delta. He stated Delta Streets Academy was founded as an afterschool program more than a decade ago and is now a privately funded school for boys in grades 4-12.
- He attended the Education Commission of the States (ECS) Winter Conference. The meeting included policy workshops on a range of topics including workforce readiness and postsecondary achievement, new teacher retention models, supporting early childhood educators, and expanding K-12 and postsecondary math pathways. ECS provides support and services to all U.S. States and territories to help education leaders create effective education policy from early care and education to workforce development.
- He stated that New York Times national educator reporter Sarah Mervoch traveled to Mississippi to spend the day in a literacy support school and meet with MDE leaders. Her story focuses on Mississippi's literacy work and the accountability system.
- He stated ABC News traveled to Mississippi to visit two schools in the metro area and interview MDE's State Literacy Director, Dr. Amanda Malone about our literacy work. The story is scheduled to be broadcast nationally in January.
- He spoke to the media:
 - Interviewed on SuperTalk Radio and WLBT about MDE's priorities for the 2026 Legislative session.
 - Interviewed by Mississippi Today and WTVA in Tupelo about the state's takeover of Okolona Separate School District. He shared with the reporters that last week we informed 19 staff members who will be affected by a Reduction in Force (RIF) as of January 1st. He stated the total district personnel are being reduced from 105 to 86 and MDE is working with surrounding districts to try and find the staff jobs.
- He stated beginning January 2026, MDE is proud to introduce a new way to celebrate both our nation and the arts. He stated that our State Board meetings will open with a recorded performance of *The National Anthem* to one of Mississippi's Top Honor Choirs. This will take place before the Pledge of Allegiance and the Invocation. He thanked Dr. Hannah Ardrey for

reaching out with this idea and collaborating with MDE to make this possible. He also thanked Mr. Limeul Eubanks, who serves as MDE's Director of PreK-12 Arts Education. He stated MDE is excited to showcase Mississippi's talented students and their directors as part of our commitment to the power of the arts.

- He recognized Dr. Sonja Robertson, MDE's Executive Director of School Improvement. Dr. Robertson is retiring on December 31st with 10 years of service at MDE and a total of 35 years of service in education. He thanked her for her leadership over the years and a lifetime of service to Mississippi students and educators.

VII. Report of the Chair

- Mr. Miller stated that yesterday the Board had a training session with Dr. Paolo DeMaria, President and Chief Executive Officer of NASBE, and they received an update on the Strategic Plan.

VIII. Reports of Student Representatives

Mr. Crosby Parker stated he had been accepted to MIT in the fall. He reported about the new mentorship program in an elementary school and the development of a guide for creating new programs across the state.

Ms. Michelle Xie reflected on the different opportunities and experiences she has had serving as the junior representative.

IX. Reports on State Board of Education Subcommittee meetings

Mr. Matt Mayo, Chair of the Internal Accountability Subcommittee, met on Thursday, December 11, and selected the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee to screen the junior representative applications due on January 30, 2026. He stated the Department released the application on December 8, 2025. The results will be brought to the Board at the May Board meeting. Mr. Mayo stated they were given a brief update on the Early Childhood Classroom audit and recommended for approval the internal audit charter that is being presented to the Board today.

Ms. Mary Werner, Chair of the Workforce/Career and Technology Education Subcommittee, stated they met today and were given an update on the Workforce Development Model. She stated that this model is integrated with the existing frameworks and the teachers do not have to do extra work they already do it. Ms. Werner stated that there are eight eco systems in the state and they identify specific jobs in each area so the curriculum can be taught to the students so they can get jobs in their areas.

X. Discussion and/or Approval of Board Items

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01. Information: Presentations by the Mississippi School of the Arts, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, and the Mississippi School for the Deaf and the Blind [Goals 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Wendy Clemons)

Dr. Bryan Marshall introduced Dr. Suzanne Hirsch, Executive Director, Mississippi School of the Arts; Ms. Ginger Tedder, Executive Director, Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science; and Mr. LaMarion Wilson, Superintendent, Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. They each presented information about their State School.

02. Information: Educator Workforce Development Update [Goal 4 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Paula Vanderford)

Dr. Courtney Van Cleave presented the update on Educator Workforce Development.

03. Information: Presentation from the Office of School and District Transformation and the Office of Academic Education outlining the MDE supports being provided to school districts during the 2025–2026 school year [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (John Ferrell and Wendy Clemons)

Ms. Wendy Clemons, Dr. Bryan Marshall, and Dr. Michelle Nowell outlined the MDE supports provided to school districts during the 2025-2026 school year.

04. Information: 2025 Update on plans to eliminate the delinquent federal audits in public school districts [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Samantha Atkinson and Paula Vanderford)

Dr. Jo Ann Malone, Ms. Kym Wiggins, and Ms. Samantha Atkinson gave an update on plans to eliminate the delinquent federal audits in public school districts.

05. Information: Presentation on AI for Instruction Pilot Status [Goals 5 – MBE Strategic Plan] (John Kraman)

Mr. John Kraman and Ms. Melissa Banks gave a presentation on AI for the Instruction Pilot Status.

Mr. Glen V. East left the meeting at 12:28 p.m.

06. Action: Approval of the MDE Contract [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Kym Wiggins)

- 06.A. Action: Contract with Toshiba America Business Solutions, Inc., to provide agency wide networked multi-function copiers for the Mississippi Department of Education Central High School Building, Greymont Location (Child Nutrition and Healthy Schools), and Career and Technical Warehouse in Pearl [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Kym Wiggins)

On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Dr. Wendi Barrett, the Board unanimously approved item 06.A. (copy attached).

07. Action: Approval of the updated Internal Audit Charter [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Samantha Atkinson)

On a motion by Mr. Bill Jacobs, seconded by Mr. Matt Mayo, the Board unanimously tabled item 07 for the January Board meeting.

08. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of monthly expenditures for the Mississippi School of the Arts (Wendy Clemons)
- B. Approval of monthly expenditures for the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (Wendy Clemons)
- C. Approval to adopt policies required by state statute for the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind to be placed on the District Policy Service website established by the Mississippi School Boards Association (Wendy Clemons)
- D. Approval of textbooks as recommended by the 2025 State Textbook Rating Committee for adoption in the areas of Health and Physical Education (K-12), Career Technical Education (9-12), and Science (K-12) – Fiscal Year 2026 (Wendy Clemons)
- E. Approval of the reappointments to the Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Licensure and Development (Paula Vanderford)
- F. Approval of nonpublic school accreditation statuses for School Year 2025-2026 (Paula Vanderford)
- G. Approval to begin the Administrative Procedures Act process: To revise Miss. Admin. Code 7-3: 63.1, State Board Policy Chapter 63, Rule 63.1 – Public Records Policy (Erin Meyer)

- H. Approval of a temporary rule and to begin the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) process: To revise Miss. Admin. Code Title 7: Part 240: Minimum Bus Specifications by amending certain existing criteria and establishing new criteria for minimum bus specifications for the sale of new buses effective July 1, 2026 (Paula Vanderford)
- I. Approval to purchase a bus for the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (Wendy Clemons)
- J. Approval to establish a qualifying score for the revised versions of certain Praxis Subject Assessments: Early Childhood Education: Foundational Knowledge and Content (Test Code 5534); Family and Consumer Sciences (5123); and Social Studies (5581) as recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Licensure and Development and approval to establish a qualifying score for Praxis Subject Assessment: Japanese: World Language (Test Code 5661) and add Japanese: World Language (Licensure Endorsement Code TBD) to the list of approved supplemental endorsements that may be added to a valid three (3) year internship license or valid five (5) year standard license by obtaining a passing score on the appropriate Praxis Subject Assessment; and update the test code associated with the Foundations of Reading Assessment to change from test code 190 to test code 890 with no changes to the test content, and no change to the current Mississippi Board of Education's required passing score (Has cleared the Administrative Procedures Act process without public comment) (Paula Vanderford)
- K. [PULLED]
- L. Information: 2025 Annual Educator Preparation Provider Teacher Preparation Performance Report in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 37-101-29 (Paula Vanderford)
- M. Approval of final calculation of the Mississippi Student Funding Formula for Fiscal Year 2027 (Kym Wiggins)
- N. Approval of final calculation of the Mississippi Student Funding Formula Base Student Cost for Fiscal Year 2027 (Kym Wiggins)

On a motion by Ms. Mary Werner, seconded by Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee, the Board unanimously approved item I. (copy attached). Mr. Matt Mayo recused himself from the vote.

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On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Dr. Wendi Barrett, the Board unanimously approved items A., B., C., D., E., F., G., H., J., L., M., and N. (copy attached).

XI. No Executive Session.

XII. State Board of Education

1. No report on meetings attended.
2. No request to attend a meeting.

XIII. Other Business

Ms. Mary Werner, on a personal preference, stated that she visited a hospital and they stated that there are a lot of teens and young people coming in with problems from vaping and smoking. She stated this is a problem.

Mr. Miller stated the January Board meeting will be held on January 15, 2026, in Jackson, Mississippi at the Central High School Building in the 4th Floor Boardroom starting at 10:00 a.m.

XIV. Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Billye Jean Stroud, seconded by Mr. Bill Jacobs, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

Approved:



Matt Miller, Board Chair
Mississippi Board of Education



Lance Evans
Executive Secretary
Mississippi Board of Education