

Minutes of Mississippi Board of Education Meeting

February 19, 2026

The members of the Mississippi Board of Education met at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 19, 2026, 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, Mr. Matt Miller, Mr. Mike Pruitt, and Ms. Billye Jean Stroud. Board members attending virtually: Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee (Madison, Mississippi) and Ms. Mary Werner (Saltillo, Mississippi). 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 10:00 a.m., after determining that a quorum of the Board existed for the purpose of conducting a meeting.

II. National Anthem

Pearl High School Chamber Singers

Pearl Public School District

Andy Beasley, Pearl High School Choir Director and Mississippi Music Educators Association President

Dr. Michael Brewer, Pearl High School Principal

Chris Chism, Pearl Public School District Superintendent

III. Mr. Matt Mayo led the Pledge of Allegiance and Mr. Mike Pruitt gave the Invocation.

IV. On a motion by Ms. Mary Werner, seconded by Mr. Glen V. East, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of January 15, 2026, Board meeting.

V. On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Ms. Billye Jean Stroud, the Board approved the agenda as presented.

VI. Recognition Ceremony

National Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) Lifetime Achievement Finalist

Rex Buckhaults (retired)

National Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) Teacher of the Year Finalist

Clint Young

Pontotoc Ridge Career & Technical Center
Pontotoc County School District

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

- MDE’s appropriations bill passed out of the House Appropriations Committee (HB 1935).
- He presented at the Legislative Black Caucus about public education progress and priorities.
- He attended the New Albany and Union County lunch-and-learn about work-based learning and cultivating a homegrown workforce that is skilled, future ready, and deeply rooted in Mississippi. He thanked Ms. Billye Jean Stroud for the invitation.
- He participated in a virtual meeting with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) with state education chiefs to hear feedback about the Interagency Agreements (IAAs) with ED and the Department of Labor and Department of Interior that were announced in November. The IAAs detail how many of the core functions of ED will be moved to other federal agencies.
- He joined members of MDE’s Academic Education team at Kosciusko Junior High School to participate in literacy training with teachers. Kosciusko is one of three districts in the state selected to participate in the Adolescent Literacy Pilot. Since October, researchers from the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University have been providing training in evidence-based literacy strategies to 4-8 grade teachers of language arts, science, and social studies.
- He attended the AASA Conference and spoke on a panel titled, *Thinking Differently About Systems Leadership*, organized by NCEE.
- He was interviewed on CNN’s “Five Good Things” podcast about Mississippi’s 2024 NAEP results, the instructional changes that drove the results, and the 2026 legislative priorities.
- He stated that board members are being provided a copy of a New York Times article that was published last week praising Mississippi’s approach to education: *These Three Red States Are the Best Hope in Schooling*. He stated the story covers a lot of topics including literacy, accountability, and chronic absenteeism. It praises Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana for showing the way forward to improve education in the nation.

VIII. Report of the Chair

- Mr. Miller had several conversations with Dr. Evans about the strategic plan and hopefully we are close to getting that over the finish line. He also discussed with him the troubled school districts.

IX. Reports of Student Representatives

Mr. Crosby Parker spoke on the benefits of the Student Advisory Council. He stated the Council includes 114 high school juniors and seniors from across Mississippi who provide input to the State Superintendent on education policy. The Council gives students a voice in statewide decisions. He stated he has been able to lead his own team on mentorship.

Ms. Michelle Xie spoke about the Distinguished Young Women (DYW) program. She stated that she was chosen as Lamar County's DYW and will be going to state in Meridian in July. She stated that it was important for schools to share opportunities with their students so they can benefit from their experiences.

X. Reports on State Board of Education Subcommittee meeting

Mr. Matt Mayo, Chair of the Internal Accountability Subcommittee, stated they met virtually on Tuesday afternoon and received several updates from program evaluation about the ongoing work around early childhood and the classroom instructions as well as the shift in their main work effort right now towards peer reporting that is going to be due mid-year around our early learning childhood programs. Then we received some updates from Sam Atkinson related to the outstanding audits and the progress that we are working towards in that area.

XI. Discussion and/or Approval of Board Items

01. Information: Report of the 2026 graduation rates for the state, district, and school levels [Goal 2 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Paula Vanderford)

Dr. Paula Vanderford and Mr. Alan Burrow reported the 2026 graduation rates for the state, district, and school levels.

02. Information: Progress of the Office of Career, Technical, and Workforce Education's K-12 Workforce Development Plan [Goals 2 and 4 – MBE Strategic Plan] (John Ferrell)

Mr. John Ferrell and Mr. Brett Robinson presented the progress of the Office of Career, Technical, and Workforce Education's K-12 Workforce Development Plan.

03. Action: Approval of the appointment of an Interim Superintendent for the Okolona Separate School District [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (John Ferrell)

On a motion by Mr. Glen V. East, seconded by Mr. Mike Pruitt, the Board unanimously approved item 03. (copy attached).

- 04. Action: Approval of the MDE Contracts [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Kym Wiggins)
 - 04.A. Action: Award contract to Level Data, LLC to provide services to the Mississippi Department of Education for maintenance and support of the Mississippi Educator Career Continuum Archive (MECCA) System [Goal 4 – MBE Strategic Plan (Paula Vanderford)]
 - 04.B. Action: Award contract to nSide, Inc. to provide services to the Mississippi Department of Education for the School Safety Platform [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Paula Vanderford)
 - 04.C. Action: Approval of the employment agreement for the Interim Superintendent for the Okolona Separate School District [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (John Ferrell)

On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Ms. Billye Jean Stroud, the Board unanimously approved items 04.A., 04.B., and 04.C. (copy attached).

- 05. Action: Approval of the MDE Grant Awards [Goals 1, 2, and 4 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Kym Wiggins)
 - 05.A. Action: Award Educator-in-Residence (EIR) grants to school districts for literacy coaching supports [Goals 1, 2, and 4 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Wendy Clemons)
 - 05.B. Action: Award Educator-in-Residence (EIR) State Systemic Improvement Plan grant to the participating school district for Director of Districts and Schools of Innovation [Goals 1, 2, and 4 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Wendy Clemons)
 - 05.C. [PULLED]

On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Mr. Bill Jacobs, the Board unanimously approved items 05.A. and 05.B. (copy attached).

- 06. Information: Discussion of Draft Mississippi Strategic Plan for Pre-K through Grade 12 Education [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Lance Evans)

Dr. Lance Evans presented the draft Mississippi Strategic Plan for Pre-K through Grade 12 Education and stated it would come to the Board as a final document in March.

Ms. Mary Werner left the meeting at 11:26 a.m.

07. 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 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
(Has cleared the Administrative Procedures Act process without public comments) (Paula Vanderford)
- E. Approval to upgrade the accreditation status of one (1) nonpublic school accredited by the MDE (Paula Vanderford)
- F. Approval to begin the Administrative Procedures Act process: To revise Miss. Admin. Code 7-12: the *Mississippi Testing Accommodations Manual* (Paula Vanderford)
- G. Approval to revise Miss. Admin. Code 7-3: 63.1, State Board Policy Chapter 63, Rule 63.1 – Public Records Policy
(Has cleared the Administrative Procedures Act process without public comments) (Erin Meyer)
- H. [PULLED]
- I. Information: Annual School Board Meeting Attendance Report in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 37-6-13 (Paula Vanderford)
- J. Information: Report on action of the Commission on School Accreditation to downgrade the Accreditation status of the Okolona Separate School District from ACCREDITED to PROBATION
(Paula Vanderford)

Mississippi Board of Education – Minutes

Page 6

February 19, 2026

- K. Approval of resignations for a certified staff and a non-instructional at-will staff for the Mississippi School of the Arts (Wendy Clemons)

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

XII. No Executive Session.

XIII. State Board of Education

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

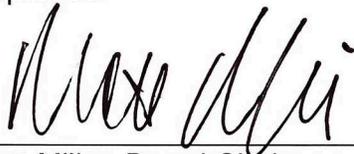
XIV. Other Business

Mr. Miller stated the March Board meeting will be held on March 19, 2026, in Jackson, Mississippi at the Central High School Building in the 4th Floor Boardroom starting at 10:00 a.m.

XV. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Matt Mayo, seconded by Ms. Billye Jean Stroud, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 11:43 a.m.

Approved:



Matt Miller, Board Chair
Mississippi Board of Education



Lance Evans
Executive Secretary
Mississippi Board of Education