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NEWS RELEASE

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Mississippi schools prepare for higher accountability standards; grades for 2025-26 will set new baseline for measuring school, district performance

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) today reminded communities and education stakeholders across the state that [new, higher standards](#) for earning school and district letter grades take effect with the 2025-26 school year.

Accountability grades will be released in fall 2026 and will set a new baseline for measuring school and district performance. Therefore, grades for 2025-26 cannot be compared to previous years. As a result of the higher standards to earn each grade, many schools and districts may receive a lower letter grade than they earned in 2024-25, even if their students performed the same or better on state assessments.

Mississippi law requires the state to increase accountability standards when 75% of students are proficient or when 65% of schools or districts earn a grade of “B” or higher. Mississippi schools and districts reached that milestone in 2023. At that time, 74% of schools and 71% of districts had earned an A or B, up from just 37% for both in 2016.

“Mississippi students and schools have made extraordinary progress, and that progress is exactly why state law requires us to raise the bar,” said Dr. Lance Evans, state superintendent of education. “The 2025-26 grades will set a new starting point from which we will measure the continued growth of our students and schools for years to come.”

The MDE worked with the agency’s Accountability Task Force, Technical Advisory Committee, and a special Standard Setting Task Force over two years to update the accountability system and establish new, higher standards for earning each letter grade. The Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) approved the updated standards in November 2025.

Mississippi’s accountability grades are designed to help teachers, school leaders, parents and communities know how well their local schools and districts serve their students. Grades are based on multiple indicators of student achievement including statewide assessment results for

English Language Arts, mathematics and science, the progress of English Learners, performance in advanced courses and career and technical education (CTE) programs, and graduation rates, among other factors. The most significant change for 2025-26 is the higher threshold of points required for schools and districts to earn each letter grade.

Another change that begins with the 2025-26 school year is a new Mississippi Readiness Index, which replaces the prior college and career readiness measures for high schools and districts. The index awards points for student performance on the ACT, SAT, ACT WorkKeys, and Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB); achievements in Advanced Placement, dual credit and dual enrollment courses, and CTE programs; industry certifications; diploma endorsements; and on-time and five-year graduation.

Additional changes include elimination of the U.S. History assessment from accountability measures and updated annual goals for the English Learner progress component.

Understanding Fall 2026 Grades

The higher standards for earning grades will set a new baseline for measuring progress, which means accountability grades for 2025-26 cannot be directly compared to grades from prior school years. Communities, parents, and local leaders are encouraged to look beyond the letter grade for 2025-26 to the individual components that make up a school or district's score for a complete evaluation of performance. State assessment results for the 2025-26 school year will be released in August 2026 and will provide the clearest early picture of student achievement. Accountability grades will be released in fall 2026 and will include details about student performance in each component that contributes to the grade.

“We want every parent, community member, and school leader to understand what these grades mean, and what they do not mean,” said Dr. Evans. “A change in a letter grade is not a report card on a child. It reflects whether a school met a higher bar. And Mississippi schools have proven time and again that they are fully capable of rising to meet higher expectations.”

MDE has developed a communication toolkit for school and district leaders that includes key facts about the accountability changes, detailed background on how the system works, and resources for communicating with local communities. The toolkit is available at mdek12.org/communications/raisingthebar.

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