



# KEEPING THE PROMISE

Brief #2: Growing Mississippi's Independent Charter Schools  
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# ABOUT *KEEPING THE PROMISE*

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## ABOUT THE *KEEPING THE PROMISE* POLICY BRIEFS

Mississippi adopted the state's first true charter school law in 2013. The *Keeping the Promise Policy Briefs* give recommendations for strengthening the law and ensuring its high-quality implementation.

This is the second brief in the *Keeping the Promise* series. The first brief identified weaknesses in the *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013* and prioritized policy recommendations to address the weaknesses.

## ABOUT MISSISSIPPI FIRST

Mississippi First is a 501c3 non-profit specializing in education policy. The organization works to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child. Mississippi First believes that high-quality public charter schools should be a part of Mississippi's public education reform strategy.

Mississippi First has been a champion for charter schools since 2008, and the organization was instrumental in getting the *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013* passed. Currently, Mississippi First provides technical assistance to the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board and provides applicant assistance to groups interested in starting schools in Mississippi through the Mississippi Charter Schools Association. The organization also provides accurate information to the public about charter schools in Mississippi.



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## BACKGROUND

The *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013* represents the state's first true charter school law. It allows for the opening of new and conversion charter schools in Mississippi. According to the law, the general purposes of the state's charter schools are:

- To improve student learning by **creating high-quality schools with high standards** for student performance;
- To **close the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing groups** of public school students;
- To **increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system for all students, especially those with a likelihood of academic failure**;
- To create **new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators, and other personnel** which allow them to have a direct voice in the operation of their schools;
- To encourage the use of different, **high-quality models of teaching, governing, scheduling, and other aspects of schooling** which meet a variety of student needs;
- To allow public school freedom and flexibility in exchange for exceptional levels of **results-driven accountability**;
- To **provide students, parents, community members, and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system**; and
- To encourage the **replication of successful charter schools**.<sup>1</sup>

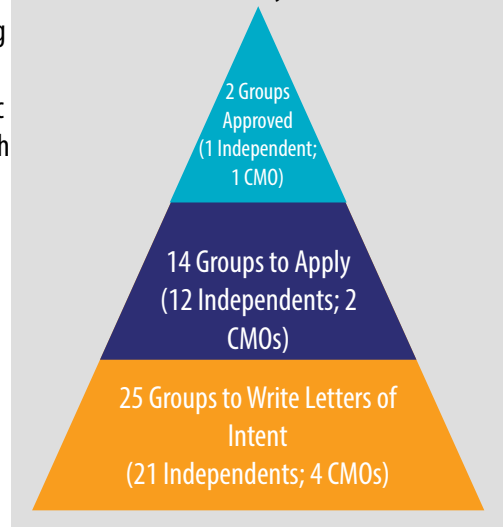
For implementation to accomplish the purposes established in the law, Mississippi must be committed to alleviating challenges for charter school expansion in all areas of the state where families and communities need a high-quality school choice.

Since the passage of the law, there have been 3 application cycles for charter schools. By law, the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board (MCSAB), the entity given the authority to approve the opening or closing of a charter school, may approve up to 15 charter schools

each year. All charter school applicants in Mississippi must be nonprofit organizations. To date, there have been 25 applicant groups to submit 44 letters of intent to open 52 charter schools across nearly every region of the state. Of the 25 groups to write letters of intent formally expressing interest in opening one or more charter schools, 14 groups have followed through to submit applications to be approved. Of these 14, 12 represent independent charter applicant groups, while 2 represent charter management organizations (CMOs), which are organizations that manage a group of schools. Presently, 2 groups have been approved by the MCSAB to open 4 schools—1 is operated by Midtown Partners, Inc., an independent charter applicant group; the remaining three will be operated by RePublic Schools, a CMO which manages charter schools in Tennessee and Mississippi. All 4 schools will be located in Jackson, Mississippi.

It is no coincidence that most organizations interested in opening charter schools in Mississippi represent independent charter applicants. Independent charter schools are also referred to as “stand alone,” “homegrown,” or “mom and pop” charter schools. While independent charter schools are

**Figure 1: Charter Applicant Activity Summary (First 3 Cycles)**



**Figure 2: Charter Applicant Activity Detail**

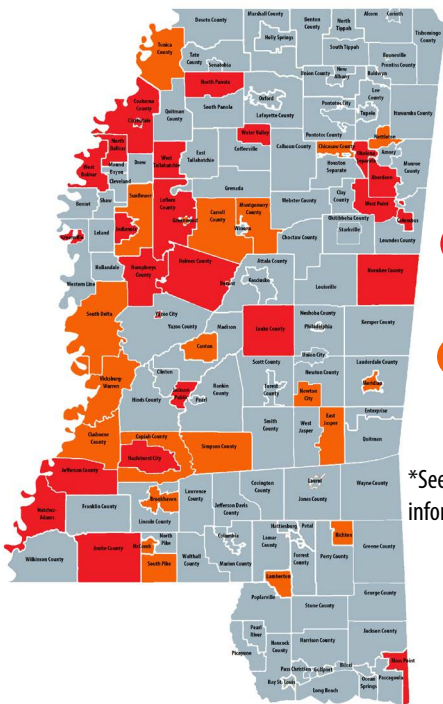
Applicant Cycle	Independent Charter Applicants	Independent Charter Approvals	CMO Applicants	CMO Approvals	No. of Districts with Applicants	No. of Districts with Approvals
1	9	0	2	1	9	1
2	5	1	1	0	7	1
3	1	0	1	1	2	1



# INDEPENDENT CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THE MISSISSIPPI CONTEXT

typically started by a group of community stakeholders with personal ties to a particular community, CMOs generally start schools in hopes of fulfilling a wider-reaching mission. Though CMOs may be committed to serving a specific region, they are less likely to have specific ties to one community, and they can be more strategic about where they open schools. For example, a CMO whose mission is to increase the number of low-income students who graduate from college might look to open a school in a community with low high school graduation rates and a viable level of resources to support start-up costs. Communities that pose great barriers to opening and sustaining charter schools may not be favorable to CMOs. Such barriers may include lack of access to facilities, lack of access to talent pools, and lack of access to start-up funds.

## Failing Districts in Mississippi (2008-2014)



This map shows which school districts have had consecutive D or F ratings in the last six years.

- Chronically Failing (D's or F's for 5 consecutive years)
- Consecutive D's or F's in the last 2-4 years

\*See Appendix A for more information.

In Mississippi, many communities possess these barriers. Nearly 1/3 of all school districts in Mississippi are classified as critical teacher shortage areas by the Mississippi Department of Education.<sup>2</sup> With over half of the population living in rural communities, Mississippi has an

abundance of communities that are best described as rural and remote.<sup>3</sup> Case studies about rural schools highlight that small rural schools are burdened by grave challenges such as the highly dependent relationship they have with building-level leadership for their success, the tight fiscal realities they face, and the struggle

to recruit and retain top teaching and leadership talent.<sup>4,5</sup> These challenges may be more intense in a place like Mississippi, with a total poverty rate of 23%<sup>6</sup> and over 26% of the rural population living in poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Given the aforementioned realities, aiding the development of independent charter schools should be a substantial part of policymakers', philanthropists', and advocates' plan to grow charters in the state. Many rural and remote communities in Mississippi have had failing school systems for several years, and the need for high-quality school choices is as much a priority in those communities as it is in Mississippi's cities. Mississippi needs a strategy to bring high-quality charter schools to its rural regions in addition to continuing to grow them in low-performing urban school districts. Independent charter schools are more likely to be started by members with a stake in the community. Their interests in a high-quality school in their local area may outweigh the challenges of starting and sustaining a school in a small, rural town.

### What is a CMO?

A Charter Management Organization (CMO) is a nonprofit that manages two or more charter schools. In addition to funding, CMOs usually provide back-office support to charter schools such as hiring, recruitment, fundraising, professional development, public relations, and advocacy. Some well-known CMOs are KIPP, Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First. RePublic Schools is the only CMO operating in Mississippi as of the 2015-2016 school year.

### What is an Independent School?

Independent charter schools are also referred to as "stand alone," "homegrown," or "mom and pop" charter schools and are usually schools opened by community stakeholders. Midtown Public Schools is the only independent school operating in Mississippi as of the 2015-2016 school year.



## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

In this report, we highlight the barriers to starting independent charter schools in Mississippi. Through our partnership with the Mississippi Charter Schools Association and our work with applicants, we have gathered substantial information about the challenges that independent charter applicants face trying to gain approval to open a charter school in Mississippi. We use this information in addition to lessons learned from other states to list the greatest challenges to starting independent charter schools in the state. At the conclusion of this report, we include recommendations to policymakers and charter school advocates for overcoming these challenges.

**To be clear, our recommendations for overcoming challenges should not be mistaken for our advocating for more relaxed standards for approving charters.**

To be clear, our recommendations for overcoming challenges should not be mistaken for our advocating for more relaxed standards for approving charters. From high-quality research on charter schools, we know that charters who do not meet high-quality applicant standards but that are allowed to open seldom achieve high-quality results. The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board has done a laudable job setting very high authorizing standards, as was intended by Mississippi's law, and has been recognized by the National Association of Charter Schools for doing so. In this report, we advocate for ways to ensure that more independent charters can meet the high standards required to open a school in Mississippi.

### **BARRIERS TO STARTING INDEPENDENT CHARTER SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI**

If Mississippi is serious about growing charter schools in the state, the barriers that independent charter schools face must be identified and addressed. Below, we highlight the biggest hurdles that independent groups confront when trying to open a charter school. We have included barriers identified by studying the lessons learned from other states in addition to those identified by our work with interested groups and applicants in Mississippi. These barriers should be understood as structural barriers above and beyond any challenges in developing a quality school plan.

### **SECURING FACILITIES**

Charter school applicants are tasked with locating and financially

securing facilities that can serve as a school site. While this is a challenge for charter schools in all settings, it is especially taxing for those in rural settings that are less likely to have unused public, private, or parochial school buildings available for purchase or lease. As a result, charters in some rural settings may have only the option to construct a new building or renovate a non-school space to meet facility needs. According to the *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013*, charter schools are granted the right of first refusal to purchase or lease closed public school facilities or properties located in the district where a charter is approved to open. This is only a viable option if such a facility is available and if the group granted the charter has sufficient financial resources to purchase or lease and, in most cases, renovate the facility.

In Mississippi, state grant funds are available for establishing or maintaining physical facilities for public schools; however, for the last decade, the Legislature has not funded the grant program, and the law specifically states that any available funds are only available to traditional school districts. Per-pupil student allocations provided by the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), which provides funding to all public schools for operating costs, are not sufficient to support the start-up facilities costs that many charter schools will incur. Without access to state facilities programs, charter schools must either raise funds from private donors or enter into financing agreements for start-up building costs. Such challenges might deter charter growth in Mississippi, especially for independent groups in regions of the state where fundraising is challenging.

Currently, the application to open a charter school in Mississippi requires applicants to thoroughly describe plans to identify and secure a facility that meets applicable state and local health and safety requirements and planning review procedures.<sup>8</sup> Though the application does not require applicants to name a specific site location, the MCSAB greatly considers whether charter applicants can fully implement their proposals in the applicants' capacity interviews occurring in the second stage of the application process. In this stage, applicants must demonstrate that they can secure a facility in the district where they want to open a school. For applicants who find fundraising too daunting for facilities costs, they may choose not to apply at all, rather than apply and be rejected for failing to provide a "sound facilities plan," as the law states.





### GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

One of the main tenets of charter school philosophy is greater autonomy and freedom from the bureaucracy within public school systems in exchange for more accountability. This principle relies on highly competent management and governance teams. Charter school applicants are tasked with recruiting qualified board members with the expertise to ensure that the school is operating according to the mission and on target to meet its goals. This can be especially challenging for independent applicants in very small communities, where fewer residents hold postsecondary degrees.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, qualified board members may be hesitant to serve out of fear they will be ostracized by those who support the traditional public school establishment.<sup>10</sup> Though this challenge is prevalent in all settings, it might especially impact charter applicants in small communities in Mississippi, in which many citizens are often closely involved with their traditional public school district. Further, because networks of qualified board members may be small, it is a challenge for charters to recruit a board that will avoid governance pitfalls such as nepotism.<sup>11</sup>

### STAFFING

Retaining and attracting an effective staff—teachers and leaders—is challenging for all public schools, including charter schools, but charter schools in rural settings have additional challenges.<sup>12</sup> Like traditional public schools, they struggle to attract talent from outside of the community due to the lack of cultural and social activities that are present in large cities. However, they also struggle to attract talent from within the community because teachers fear that if the charter school fails, then their employers will not welcome them back.

In Mississippi, charter schools are granted the flexibility to hire 25% of teachers without a state teaching license at the time of approval as long as all teachers are highly qualified under federal laws. However, after year 3, charter schools are allowed no flexibility to hire highly talented teachers who lack a state license due to a requirement in the law that 100% of charter school teachers be state-certified by the school's third year of operation. Across the country, charters in other states have flexibility in staffing practices that can allow them to be more innovative in how they recruit, train, and support teachers. Without this flexibility, Mississippi charter schools face an additional obstacle in recruiting staff.

An additional challenge that charter schools face when recruiting teachers, especially experienced teachers from Mississippi, is the

inability to opt-in to the state retirement system (PERS). Under the law, no charter school teacher may participate in PERS. For all public school teachers hired on or after July 1, 2007, PERS requires teachers to work for eight years to become vested, which enables teachers to achieve full retirement benefits and access to employer contributions upon retiring. Unvested public school teachers who make a choice to work in public charter schools will not continue to accrue the required years to reach full retirement benefits. This may greatly impact a teacher's decision to join the staff of a charter school.

Independent charter school applicants face even greater challenges attempting to recruit a highly effective school leader. Unlike principals of traditional public schools or even leaders of charter schools operated under a CMO, independent charter school leaders must possess a wide-range of skills as they often must serve as the operational, business, and instructional leader of a start-up school. Currently in Mississippi, the primary pipelines for school leaders are the state's schools of education, none of which offer courses aimed at leading charter schools or founding start-up organizations. Though school leaders of charter schools do not need an administrative license and may be recruited from a variety of leadership pipelines outside of educational institutions, they must still possess the knowledge and skills necessary to lead an effective school. Recruiting a school leader might also be especially challenging to independent applicants who do not possess the extensive networks and brand recognition that CMOs have. At least two independent charter applicants in the state have expressed great concern over recruiting a qualified school leader capable of carrying out the mission of the school.<sup>13,14</sup> Additionally, applicants have expressed that when they are able to identify prospective leaders who work in school districts, those leaders are reluctant to sign on as a charter school leader out of fear of reprisal from their superiors.<sup>15</sup>

### START-UP COSTS

Groups interested in starting a charter school face substantial start-up costs. In addition to costs associated with facilities and school materials, charter

#### Start-Up Phase

The start-up phase for charter schools spans many years. Most charter schools start with 1 or 2 grades in year 1, and they add a grade each year until they reach capacity. During the expansion years, many charters must cover fixed costs (i.e. facilities, utilities, transportation) even though they have not grown to full enrollment.

school applicants often need funds to recruit teachers, school leaders, and students. Teachers and school leaders are likely to be hired prior to



## BARRIERS TO STARTING INDEPENDENT CHARTER SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI

the start of the school year to plan and receive training. Additionally, applicants devote countless hours and resources to the application process and planning for the school's operations.

Presently, in Mississippi, charter school applicants must either fundraise or enter into financing agreements to cover 100% of their start-up costs. After an applicant has been approved to open a charter school, the group has one full year to prepare for the school to open in the following year. Public funds supporting the charter school will only be dispersed after students have enrolled and the school year has begun. The costs associated with start-up coupled with the challenges of fundraising can especially discourage independent charter schools in communities without many resources available.

### **SMALL DISTRICTS**

Charter schools, like traditional public schools, are funded on a per-pupil basis. Though charter schools vary in school design and structure, each has a projected enrollment that will allow the school to operate on public dollars alone. Achieving this projected enrollment is especially important to independent charter groups that may not have the resources or networks to fundraise like CMOs. Charter schools are only allowed to enroll students from the district where the school is located. In Mississippi, many school districts have small student enrollments, and operating two schools that serve the same grade levels would be

cost prohibitive. Additionally, a charter school seeking to open in a small district might cause a higher level of opposition from the community due to the sustainability issues of having two schools.

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

The first Mississippi charter school opened its doors in the summer of 2015, and charters have only opened in one school district in the state. Generally, many communities in Mississippi are not informed about charter schools. To launch an effective school, charter applicants must garner the support of the community where the school will be located. In phase two of the charter school application process, the MCSAB holds a public meeting in the location of the proposed charter school and allows the public to comment on the charter application. Charter applicants must work to demonstrate community support during this meeting.

In many remote and close-knit areas where the school district is the county's largest employer and the superintendent carries great political power, demonstrating community support can be a great barrier for a charter applicant.<sup>16</sup> In many cases, charter applicants must be willing to challenge the educational establishment in a community. This may be more challenging for an applicant group within the community than for an outside group associated with a CMO.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the challenges that independent charter schools face, Mississippi First has made a list of recommendations for policy makers and advocates of charter expansion in Mississippi. Many of these recommendations are listed in our first [Keeping the Promise](#) brief that captured general recommendations for strengthening the state charter school law.

1

**CROSSING DISTRICT LINES**—Change the language in the law to ensure that students may cross district lines to attend a charter school.

If families could cross district lines to attend a charter school, the charter school could draw students from many districts to meet enrollment goals which mitigates the impact on any one school district. This would increase the chances that independent charter schools can open in Mississippi, especially in smaller communities.

2

**CONVERSION SCHOOLS**—Allow conversion charter schools the right to use their facilities by leasing or purchasing them at or below fair market value.

The law defines a conversion school as a charter school that previously existed as a non-charter public school. In addition to meeting the application requirements, conversion charter school applicants must present a petition signed by a majority of teachers or parents of students in the existing school, or they must have a majority vote of approval from the local school board in the district where they wish to locate. Founding a conversion school can be a viable option for a group of teachers or parents looking for better options for their children, and without the challenge of finding a facility, it can be less daunting.

In 2014, an Attorney General's opinion stated that school districts would maintain control over property and facilities of a school successfully converting to a charter school. Though the charter school would have the right of first refusal to purchase or lease closed or vacant property owned by the district at or below fair market value, the school district is not obligated to sell or lease the property. School districts seeking to hamper the efforts of a conversion charter school may try to withhold the facility by refusing to sell or lease it. To prevent this, the Legislature should amend the law to state that conversion charter schools have a

right to lease or buy their facilities at or below a fair market value upon being granted approval by the Authorizer Board. With fewer barriers to founding a conversion school, parents and teachers may have a better chance of creating a new option in their communities.

3

**TEACHER CERTIFICATION**—Exempt 25% of charter school teachers from state certification if they are highly qualified under federal rules.

In a 2013 [paper](#) on teacher quality, Mississippi First highlights how granting hiring flexibility to charter schools can illuminate new methods of training and supporting teachers that all public schools could follow. Innovative practices in training teachers may prove to be even more beneficial in Mississippi's critical teacher shortage areas. The Legislature should amend the current language to exempt at any time 25% of charter school teachers from state certification if those teachers are highly qualified under federal rules. This would mitigate recruiting challenges that charter schools might have and allow charter schools to innovate in their teacher training practices.

4

**PERS**—Allow all public school teachers – whether in a charter school or traditional school – to opt-in to PERS by removing the restriction in the law.

Allowing charter school teachers to opt-in to PERS would remove one additional barrier independent charter schools may face when attempting to recruit staff. This is especially important for independent charter schools with limited recruitment resources.

5

**STATE FACILITIES PROGRAMS**—Fund the state grant program for establishing and maintaining physical facilities, and allow charter schools to have access to the funds.

Currently, state grant funds for facilities are available to traditional school districts only. Charter schools are public schools and, as such, should have access to these funds. In the past decade, however, the state facilities program has not been funded. To provide more opportunities for independent charter schools to raise funds for creating new schools, the Legislature should fund the state grant program for facilities and allow charter schools to compete for funds.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

6

**START-UP FUNDS**—Secure start-up funds for approved charter schools, and start a state charter school revolving loan program.

The largest sources of start-up funding for charter schools are the United States Department of Education's Charter School Program grants and funding from national foundations. Recently, Mississippi applied for a federal charter school program grant to provide start-up funds to approved charter schools in their start-up years. Unfortunately, Mississippi was not awarded any funds. One complication is that only the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) could be the applicant even though MDE has no authority over charter schools. National foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the New Schools Venture Fund, fund the replication of high-performing schools, but they are less known for providing start-up funds for independent charter schools not associated with a high-performing CMO. Because Mississippi has yet to establish a strong charter school movement, national foundations have very limited interest in providing start-up funds to the state. The MCSAB should continue to search for start-up funds for approved charter schools.

Due to fundraising difficulties, a lack of federal funding, and the limited interest that national foundations have in funding charter school expansion in Mississippi, the state should create more avenues to ensure that a lack of start-up funds will not be the barrier stopping high-quality school choices from opening in communities in need. Specifically, the Legislature should approve a state charter school revolving loan program to provide charter schools with start-up funds. Charter schools may struggle financially during their start-up years, but after full enrollment, they can sustain on public dollars and repay monies borrowed.

7

**APPLICANT SUPPORT**—Invest in programs and organizations that provide support to charter school applicants.

Mississippi First advocates for a rigorous charter school application process. We believe that a high-quality application takes at least one full year to complete and that schools are more likely to be successful if thoughtful and effective planning takes place. That said, charter

applicants need support to understand the charter school law and the multiple parts of the planning process, to build community support, to connect with experts who may specialize in their areas of weakness, and to access data important for the development of their application.

Currently, there is very little capacity in the state for applicant support. Previously, the Mississippi Charter Schools Association existed to provide applicant support; however, with one staff member, capacity was limited as well. Presently, the organization's board is still active, but there are no staff members. Advocates and philanthropists wishing to see charter school expansion throughout the state should heavily invest in organizations and programs that provide support to charter school applicants. This work must be done by organizations outside of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board to prevent conflicts of interest for the Board as an authorizer.

8

**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PIPELINES**—Invest in training prospective charter school leaders; match high-quality leaders to interested community groups; and incentivize schools of education to offer courses in charter school leadership.

Starting and sustaining a charter school in Mississippi requires a great amount of dedication, expertise, and perseverance. To successfully expand charter schools throughout the state, Mississippi must cultivate high-quality leaders willing to work in communities with great need.

Charter school advocates and philanthropists interested in seeing charter expansion in Mississippi should heavily invest in sending prospective charter school leaders through high-quality school leadership training programs to best prepare them to found and lead highly effective schools in Mississippi communities. Such programs include the Building Excellent Schools (BES) program and the National Principals Academy at the Relay Graduate School of Education. BES is a program designed specifically for training charter school leaders to build and sustain successful start-up schools in high-needs areas,<sup>17</sup> while the Relay National Principals Academy focuses on providing high-quality leadership training to experienced leaders. The Relay program might be ideal for school leaders looking to start a conversion charter school. Both are highly selective programs with costly price tags. The National Principals Academy works with partner organizations to sponsor leaders to participate in a year-long fellowship for \$18,000 per



## RECOMMENDATIONS

person, while BES receives funding from foundations to work in specific regions. In conversations with staff at BES about training Mississippi school leaders, they expressed that they would need to an investment of \$350,000 per school leader from Mississippi in order to expand to this area.<sup>18</sup>

A second approach to providing high-quality leadership to charter school applicants is working to strategically pair effective leaders in the state with applicant groups interested in starting a school in their communities. Charter support groups should use this strategy in their work to expand charter schools in Mississippi.

Lastly, Mississippi universities should offer courses to prospective school leaders specifically about charter school leadership and founding a start-up or conversion charter school. Charter school leadership can be a choice for educational leaders looking to work in a public school setting outside of a school district. However, no university training programs presently offer courses for school leaders who may be interested in charter school leadership. To encourage the integration of charter school topics and leadership training for start-up or conversion schools in our state universities, the Legislature should fund a program to incentivize state schools of education to offer courses in charter school leadership.



## CONCLUSION

Strong policies governing the opening, monitoring, and closing of charter schools are extremely important. Research confirms that rigorous charter school laws and high-quality authorizers lead to high-quality charter schools.<sup>19</sup> Mississippi has one of the best charter laws in the nation.<sup>20</sup> Mississippi also has the advantage of a quality-focused first Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board that has implemented

high standards. Now that we have gotten the policy right, the real work begins. We must ensure that the policy translates to high-quality school options for Mississippi students who need them. We challenge the Mississippi Legislature and advocates for charter school expansion to enact our recommendations and ensure that more independent charter schools can open in Mississippi communities.



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>10</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup>Sullins, Carolyn, and Gary Miron. 2005. *Challenges of Starting and Operating Charter Schools: A Multicase Study*. Research Report, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo: The Evaluation Center. Accessed 2015. [http://homepages.wmich.edu/~miron/publics/cs\\_challenges\\_report.pdf](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~miron/publics/cs_challenges_report.pdf).
- <sup>12</sup>Stuit, David, and Sy Doan. 2012. *Beyond City Limits: Expanding Public Charter Schools in Rural America*. Issue Brief, Washington, D.C.: National Alliance of Public Charter Schools. Accessed 2015. [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NAPCS\\_Beyond-City-Limits\\_Issue-Brief\\_2\\_27\\_2012\\_20120223T101259.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NAPCS_Beyond-City-Limits_Issue-Brief_2_27_2012_20120223T101259.pdf).
- <sup>13</sup>Inspire Charter School Board of Trustees (charter school applicant group), in discussion with Angela Bass, April 2014.
- <sup>14</sup>Midtown Public Charter School Board of Trustees (charter school applicant group), in discussion with Angela Bass, October 2014.
- <sup>15</sup>Inspire Charter School Board of Trustees (charter school applicant group), in discussion with Angela Bass, April 2014.
- <sup>16</sup>Stuit, David, and Sy Doan. 2012. *Beyond City Limits: Expanding Public Charter Schools in Rural America*. Issue Brief, Washington, D.C.: National Alliance of Public Charter Schools. Accessed 2015. [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NAPCS\\_Beyond-City-Limits\\_Issue-Brief\\_2\\_27\\_2012\\_20120223T101259.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/NAPCS_Beyond-City-Limits_Issue-Brief_2_27_2012_20120223T101259.pdf).
- <sup>17</sup>Building Excellent Schools. 2015. "About Building Excellent Schools." Accessed October 8. <http://buildingexcellentschools.org/>.
- <sup>18</sup>Linda Brown (founder of Building Excellent Schools), in discussion with Angela Bass, August 2014.
- <sup>19</sup>Center for Research on Education Outcomes. 2009. *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*. Research Report, Stanford University, Stanford: Center for Research on Education Outcomes. Accessed 2015. [http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/MULTIPLE\\_CHOICE\\_CREDO.pdf](http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/MULTIPLE_CHOICE_CREDO.pdf).
- <sup>20</sup>Ziebarth, Todd, and Bierlein Palmer. 2014. *Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws*. Policy Report, Washington, D.C.: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Accessed 2015. <http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/StateRankings2014.pdf>.



## APPENDIX A

Between 2008 and 2015, Mississippi has used two different accountability systems to rate schools and districts. Each has its own rating labels. In 2011-2012, the Mississippi Department of Education began using both descriptive performance ratings as well as A-F grades to rate schools and districts. In 2012-2013, the Mississippi Department of Education transitioned completely to an A-F rating system with a new accountability system. We have used the Mississippi Department of Education's equivalences as guidance in preparing the chart below to demonstrate what the descriptive performance ratings mean on the A-F scale.

Pre-2011-2012 Rating	A-F Rating
Star	A
High Performing	B
Successful	C
Academic Watch	D
Low Performing	F
At Risk of Failing	F
Failing	F

During the 2011-2012 school year, three districts did not receive accountability ratings due to their participation in the Excellence for All pilot. These three districts were Clarksdale Municipal, Corinth, and Gulfport. In the 2012-2013 school year, each of these districts received a district-wide rating. In 2013-2014, testing irregularities in the Clarksdale Municipal School District led the Mississippi Department of Education to assign a "P" or "pending" rating to the district until the investigation could be resolved.

- Chronically Failing (D's or F's for 5 consecutive years)
- Consecutive D's or F's in the last 2-4 years

SCHOOL DISTRICT RATINGS FOR THE LAST 6 SCHOOL YEARS						
District Name	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
ABERDEEN SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	D	D
ALCORN SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
AMITE CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
AMORY SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
ATTALA CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	D	C	C
BALDWIN SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	D	C	C
BAY ST LOUIS WAVELAND SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
BENOIT SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	LOW PERFORMING	D	C	C
BENTON CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
BILOXI PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
BOONEVILLE SCHOOL DIST	STAR DISTRICT	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
BROOKHAVEN SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
CALHOUN CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	F	D	D
CARROLL COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
CHICKASAW CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
CHOCTAW CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	B	B	B



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CLAIBORNE CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	F	D	D
CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	N/A	D	P
CLAY CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	C	C
CLEVELAND SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
CLINTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	STAR DISTRICT	A	A	A
COAHOMA CO AHS	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	LOW PERFORMING	F	F	F
COAHOMA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	LOW PERFORMING	F	F	F
COFFEEVILLE SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	C	C
COLUMBIA SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
COLUMBUS MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
COPIAH CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
CORINTH SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	N/A	A	A
COVINGTON CO SCHOOLS	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
DESOTO CO SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
DREW SCHOOL DIST	FAILING	FAILING	FAILING	F		
DURANT PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	D	D
EAST JASPER CONSOLIDATED SCH DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
EAST TALLAHATCHIE CONSOL SCH DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	D	C	C
ENTERPRISE SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	STAR DISTRICT	STAR DISTRICT	A	A	A
FOREST MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	C	C
FORREST COUNTY AG HIGH SCHOOL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
FORREST COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
FRANKLIN CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
GEORGE CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
GREENE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
GREENVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	D	D
GREENWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
GRENADA SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
GULFPORT SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	SUCCESSFUL	N/A	B	B
HANCOCK CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
HARRISON CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
HATTIESBURG PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
HAZLEHURST CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FAILING	FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
HINDS CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
HOLLANDALE SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
HOLLY SPRINGS SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C





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HOLMES CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	F	F
HOUSTON SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
HUMPHREYS CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	D	D
INDIANOLA SCHOOL DIST	FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	FAILING	D	F	F
ITAWAMBA CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
JACKSON CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
JACKSON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
JEFFERSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	F	F
JEFFERSON DAVIS CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
JONES CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
KEMPER CO SCHOOL DIST	FAILING	FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	C	C
KOSCIUSKO SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
LAFAYETTE CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
LAMAR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
LAUDERDALE CO SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
LAUREL SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
LAWRENCE CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
LEAKE CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	LOW PERFORMING	D	D	D
LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
LEFLORE CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	F	F	F
LELAND SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	C	C
LINCOLN CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
LONG BEACH SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
LOUISVILLE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
LOWNDES CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
LUMBERTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	D	D
MADISON CO SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
MARION CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
MARSHALL CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
MCCOMB SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
MERIDIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	C	D	D
MONROE CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
MONTGOMERY CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	LOW PERFORMING	C	D	D
MOSS POINT SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	D	D
MOUND BAYOU PUBLIC SCHOOL	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
NATCHEZ-ADAMS SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	F	F
NESHOBA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B



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NETTLETON SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
NEW ALBANY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	HIGH PERFORMING	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
NEWTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
NEWTON MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
NORTH BOLIVAR SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	F	F
NORTH PANOLA SCHOOLS	FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	LOW PERFORMING	D	D	D
NORTH PIKE SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	D	B	B
NORTH TIPPAAH SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	D	B	B
NOXUBEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	F	F
OCEAN SPRINGS SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
OKOLONA SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	FAILING	FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	D	D
OKTIBBEHA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	C	C
OXFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
PASCAGOULA SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
PASS CHRISTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	STAR DISTRICT	STAR DISTRICT	STAR DISTRICT	A	A	A
PEARL PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
PEARL RIVER CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
PERRY CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C
PETAL SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	STAR DISTRICT	STAR DISTRICT	B	A	A
PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	D	C	C
PICAYUNE SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
PONTOTOC CITY SCHOOLS	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
PONTOTOC CO SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
POPLARVILLE SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
PRENTISS CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	B	B	B
QUITMAN CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	C	C
QUITMAN SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C
RANKIN CO SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
RICHTON SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	D	D
SCOTT CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
SENATOBIA MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	ACADEMIC WATCH	B	B	B
SHAW SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	F	F
SIMPSON CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	D	D
SMITH CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	B	B
SOUTH DELTA SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	B	D	D
SOUTH PANOLA SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	C	C



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SOUTH PIKE SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	C	D	D
SOUTH TIPPAH SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	B	B
STARKVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	C	C
STONE CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
SUNFLOWER CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	LOW PERFORMING	C	D	D
TATE CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
TISHOMINGO CO SP MUN SCH DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
TUNICA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	D	F	F
TUPELO PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	B	B	B
UNION CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	B	B	B
UNION PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	HIGH PERFORMING	B	A	A
VICKSBURG WARREN SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	D	D
WALTHALL CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	C	C
WATER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
WAYNE CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	ACADEMIC WATCH	SUCCESSFUL	D	C	C
WEBSTER CO SCHOOL DIST	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	B	A	A
WEST BOLIVAR SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	F	F	F
WEST JASPER CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS	AT RISK OF FAILING	SUCCESSFUL	SUCCESSFUL	C	B	B
WEST POINT SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
WEST TALLAHATCHIE SCHOOL DISTRICT	FAILING	FAILING	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	D	D
WESTERN LINE SCHOOL DISTRICT	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	C	D	D
WILKINSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AT RISK OF FAILING	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	D	F	F
WINONA SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	HIGH PERFORMING	HIGH PERFORMING	ACADEMIC WATCH	C	B	B
YAZOO CITY MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	AT RISK OF FAILING	LOW PERFORMING	F	F	F
YAZOO CO SCHOOL DIST	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	ACADEMIC WATCH	D	C	C