

### BACKGROUND

In FY 2024, PEER received funding to contract with GlimpseK12 (an education technology company headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama) to conduct a comparative review of 50 school districts in Mississippi. This review is a continuation of GlimpseK12's work in 2023, in which Glimpse reviewed FY 2023 data for 30 school districts in Mississippi (see PEER report 693). This report focuses on the area of instruction. For reports on non-instructional areas for FY 2023, see PEER Report #703 Volumes I through VI.

This report contains the following instructional analyses: grade inflation, mastery decline, student proficiency and bubble, and resource implementation fidelity.

#### GRADE INFLATION

*Grade inflation* is evidenced when students receive high grades--e.g., As and Bs--but do not score proficient on state evaluation exams.

Grade inflation negatively impacts students because high grades give the impression to students and parents that students have mastered the required content, although subsequent state evaluation exams do not demonstrate that mastery.

#### KEY FINDINGS

- For the 2022-2023 school year, approximately 31% of the scores of students in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> in the districts reporting demonstrated grade inflation in Math and English Language Arts (ELA). Student scores in 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA exhibited the highest level of grade inflation at 40%.
- Although some level of grade inflation is expected, districts with greater than 25% inflation in a grade level should conduct a systemic review of grading practices.

#### MASTERY DECLINE

School districts use benchmark assessments during a school year to monitor students' mastery of a subject. *Mastery decline* is evidenced when a student scores lower on a benchmark assessment at the end of the school year than at the beginning of the school year, even if the decline is one point.

Mastery decline negatively impacts a student's performance and confidence, creates challenges and additional expenses for school districts in addressing such, leads to higher dropout rates, and reduces a student's preparedness for college and career entry.

#### KEY FINDINGS

- For the 2022-2023 school year, approximately 34% of students in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> in the districts reporting demonstrated mastery decline in Math and ELA. Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA demonstrated the greatest decline at 49%.
- Factors contributing to mastery decline include absenteeism, summer break, ineffective instructional practices, misaligned resources, course scheduling, and ineffective processes to identify, track, and mitigate students with mastery decline.

To measure students' mastery of a subject, districts use two common types of formative/benchmark assessments:

1) **Adaptive Assessments:** Adaptive assessments are characterized by their ability to assess a student's starting point (on or off grade level) and ending point (on or off grade level). These assessments are useful to track how far a student has progressed from the start of the year to the end regardless of where the student started.

2) **On Grade Level Benchmarking:** On grade level benchmark assessments are characterized by their ability to assess a student's level of mastery based on current grade level content at the beginning of the year and again on current grade level content at the end of the year.

Since each method assesses students' mastery based on different criteria, comparisons and conclusions across the two assessment types should be avoided.

## STUDENT PROFICIENCY AND BUBBLE

Education assessments use a benchmark score threshold to identify whether a student is proficient in the required content, with students scoring above the threshold being proficient.

Students scoring within 3% to 5% above or below the proficiency threshold represent an important cohort because these students often vacillate above and below the proficiency threshold and if left unidentified, may struggle to grow academically. This group is referred to in this report as the “bubble” group.

## RESOURCE IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

*Resource implementation fidelity* refers to the extent to which districts implement an education program or practice as planned or intended by developers.

Deviations from intended use and delivery methods may compromise the effectiveness of the educational program or resource and negatively impact students’ educational preparedness.

## KEY FINDINGS

For the 2022-2023 school year and for students in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> in the districts reporting,

- approximately one-fifth of students scored within 3% above or below the proficiency threshold in Math; and,
- approximately one-fifth of students scored within 3% above or below the proficiency threshold in English Language Arts.

## KEY FINDINGS

For the 2022-2023 school year and for students in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> in the districts reporting,

- 22% and 12% of students met the resource implementation fidelity thresholds in Math and English Language Arts, respectively; and,
- 46% and 34% of students met at least 50% of the resource implementation fidelity thresholds in Math and English Language Arts, respectively.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS

Grade Inflation recommendations:

- Implement an annual review process to identify, track, and manage grade inflation each year.
- Review the level of rigor and alignment of assignments and assessments in grade levels presenting high inflation.
- See page 18 for a full listing of recommendations pertaining to grade inflation.

Mastery Decline recommendations:

- Utilize software applications or other processes that automate the identification and tracking of decline in mastery.
- Create detailed reports that provide an overview of decline in mastery at various levels, including district, school, grade, and classroom. These reports should enable educators to pinpoint where decline in mastery is occurring to provide targeted support.
- See page 35 for a full listing of recommendations pertaining to mastery decline.

Student Proficiency and Bubble recommendations:

- Allocate a person or team to manage the proficiency and bubble student analysis process.
- Employ a software application or process that effectively generates proficiency and bubble student analysis and create comprehensive reports at different levels (district, school, grade, and classroom) that will identify the bubble groups.
- See page 67 for a full listing of recommendations pertaining to student proficiency and bubble analysis.

Resource Implementation Fidelity recommendations:

- Maintain a process or software application to monitor closely the resource implementation fidelity and effectiveness of all purchased resources.
- Conduct intra-year evaluations of implementation fidelity and effectiveness.
- See page 77 for a full listing of recommendations pertaining to resource implementation fidelity.