Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER)

Report to
the Mississippi Legislature

A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program

While both U. S. and Mississippi dropout rates have declined slightly over the past decade, the personal and social costs of any individual dropping out of school are high. Further, Mississippi's statewide four-year cohort dropout rate of 26.6% for the school year ending in 2005 masks significant variation in the rates from district to district, with eleven of the state's 152 public school districts having four-year cohort dropout rates in excess of 40% and ten of the districts having dropout rates of less than 9%.

Both the federal government and Mississippi have initiatives in place to prevent students from dropping out of school. Through related programs and federal and state legislation, the efforts in preventing dropouts are widespread and have been in existence for many years.

While the Mississippi Department of Education's current dropout prevention effort provides the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals and nationally recognized strategies and best practices, elements of the department's program implementation pose concern. The department did not evaluate the status and effectiveness of the districts' 2004 dropout prevention plans, which would have helped to ensure the most efficient use of those plans in identifying and adopting best practices, to reduce confusion between existing plans and the requirements of the new 2007 plan, and to limit duplication of effort between the existing plans and the new plan. PEER found no clearly defined strategy to ensure districts' careful adherence to adopted best practices or to rigorous, ongoing program evaluation and oversight to ensure acceptable outcomes.

December 11, 2007

PEER: The Mississippi Legislature's Oversight Agency

The Mississippi Legislature created the Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER Committee) by statute in 1973. A joint committee, the PEER Committee is composed of seven members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker and seven members of the Senate appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. Appointments are made for four-year terms with one Senator and one Representative appointed from each of the U. S. Congressional Districts. Committee officers are elected by the membership with officers alternating annually between the two houses. All Committee actions by statute require a majority vote of four Representatives and four Senators voting in the affirmative.

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The Committee assigns top priority to written requests from individual legislators and legislative committees. The Committee also considers PEER staff proposals and written requests from state officials and others.

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December 11, 2007

Honorable Haley Barbour, Governor
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On December 11, 2007, the PEER Committee authorized release of the report entitled **A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program.**

Representative Harvey Moss, Chair

This report does not recommend increased funding or additional staff.

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A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program

Executive Summary

Introduction

During its 2006 Regular Session, the Legislature established the Office of Dropout Prevention within the Department of Education, effective July 1, 2006. The Legislature directed this office to work with the state's public school districts to establish dropout prevention plans and programs designed to increase the statewide ninth through twelfth grade cohort graduation rate to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year (from 60.8% during the 2004-2005 school year).

In response to a legislative inquiry, the PEER Committee reviewed the Office of Dropout Prevention's implementation of the statewide public school dropout prevention program. While the office was only one year into a thirteen-year program at the time of PEER's review, because the state and districts had been actively engaged in dropout prevention efforts since passage of the Education Reform Act in 1982, PEER determined that a review of the efforts of the newly created office could benefit both the department and the Legislature in efforts to reduce the state's public school dropout rates.

PEER focused its review on addressing the following questions:

- What is the dropout problem nationally and in Mississippi?

- What have the federal government and Mississippi done to address our state's dropout problem?

- Has the early implementation phase of Mississippi's current dropout prevention effort provided a foundation for success?

What is the dropout problem nationally and in Mississippi?

While U. S. and Mississippi dropout rates have declined slightly over the past decade, the personal and social costs of any individual dropping out of school are high. Further, Mississippi's statewide four-year cohort dropout rate of 26.6% for the school year ending in 2005 masks significant variation in the rates from district to district, with eleven of the state's 152 public school districts having four-year cohort dropout rates in excess of 40% and ten of the districts having dropout rates of less than 9%.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to several related, more specific questions, each addressed below.

How do education policymakers define *dropout* and related terms?

The definitions of "dropout" and related terms are important because who is included in each term affects the associated rate calculations.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has adopted the National Center for Education Statistics' definition of a dropout. A *dropout* is an individual who:

- was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;

- was not enrolled in school at the beginning of the current school year;

- has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved educational program (GED program); and,

- does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved educational program (GED program); temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or death.

Other students excluded from being counted as dropouts are those that are home schooled; attend a non-public school program for disability, illness, drug or alcohol problems, or emotional or psychological problems; attend state-operated schools such as Oakley; or are enrolled in a certificate completion program. Any student attending an Adult Basic Education GED program must be counted as a dropout under federal regulations governing the funding of these programs.

MDE defines *graduates* as "students earning traditional diplomas." Graduates, special education students earning occupational diplomas, special education students earning certificates of attendance, and students earning a GED through a district- or state-approved program are counted as completers.

How do education policymakers calculate the dropout rate and related rates?

While several methods exist for calculating dropout and related rates, the cohort or longitudinal method is considered the best method because it shows the percentage of students who dropped out, completed, or graduated from a given graduating class during a specified period, usually ninth through twelfth grade or seventh through twelfth grade.

Primary Methods of Calculating the Rates

Dropout Rate Calculations

Exhibit A on page xii describes the three primary methods of calculating dropout rates and the advantages and disadvantages of each method, according to the SREB. As the exhibit shows, in a state such as Mississippi with an information system designed to track individual students, the longitudinal or cohort method is the method of reporting dropouts that is most consistent with the public's perception of what the dropout rate should measure.

Graduation Rate Calculations

There are three primary ways of calculating the graduation rate:

- *traditional graduation rate*--calculated by dividing the number of students receiving a traditional diploma in a given school year by the number of students who were enrolled in the ninth grade four years earlier. This rate does not track individual students, but provides annual data for all students enrolled.

- *cohort graduation rate*--calculated in the same manner as the cohort dropout rate, with the numerator being the number of students in the cohort receiving a traditional diploma (rather than the number of students who dropped out); and,

- *averaged freshman graduation rate*--calculated by estimating the proportion of public high school freshmen that graduate with a regular diploma four years after starting the ninth grade.

Completion Rate Calculation

The status completion rate denotes the percentage of individuals who are not in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent credential. This rate does not take into account when the credential

was achieved. The cohort completion rate is calculated the same way as the cohort dropout rate, with the numerator being the number of students in the cohort who are completers (rather than the number of students who dropped out).

Exhibit A: Advantages and Disadvantages of the Primary Methods of Calculating Dropout Rates

Type of Dropout Rate	Method of Calculation	Advantages	Disadvantages
Longitudinal or Cohort	divide the number of students who drop out by the number in the original class, adjusted for transfer students; while a cohort is usually measured from the 9th grade through the 12th grade, it can also be measured from the 7th grade through the 12th grade	+the method is most consistent with the public's perception of dropouts +accounts for students who leave school one year and return later +accounts for students who are retained in grade nine but stay in school and graduate later than their original classmates	-states may not have information systems to track individual students as they progress from grade to grade -absent of information systems, cohort rates often are estimated based on a sample of students or projected based on "annual" dropout rates.
Annual Event	percentage of students who are enrolled in May or June who do not graduate and do not return to school in September or October	+easy to calculate +a practical way to determine the number of students who leave school each year	-only includes students who drop out each year; it may understate the dropout problem over four years -the calculation is affected by the range of grade levels used to compute the rates
Status	percentage of a particular age group who are not enrolled in school and who do not have a high school diploma	+may be the most appropriate rate for comparing state results and for determining changes over time	-like all estimates based on samples, the percentages have some errors -not available for individual schools and school districts

SOURCE: Southern Regional Education Board, Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series, *Reducing Dropout Rates*.

Rate Calculations: Reporting Requirements

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to calculate and report traditional graduation and annual event dropout rates.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-21-9 (d) (1972) requires MDE to report annually the cohort graduation and dropout rates to the Legislature "based on Grades 7 through 12 and

Grades 9 through 12 cohort groups, statewide and by district." The recent implementation of the Mississippi Student Information System has allowed MDE to calculate ninth through twelfth grade cohort rates, beginning with the student cohort that entered the ninth grade during the 2001-2002 school year. Implementation of MSIS will also allow MDE to calculate the seventh through twelfth grade cohort rates in the future.

What are the dropout and graduation rates and historical trends for the U. S. and for Mississippi?

During the school years beginning in 1993 and ending in 2005, dropout rates, calculated according to the annual event method (cohort data is not available over this period), have generally declined both nationally and in Mississippi, while graduation rates have remained fairly constant since the 1990-1991 school year. However, it is important to note that there is wide variation in the dropout, graduation, and completion rates by individual public school district in Mississippi.

Dropout rates calculated according to the annual event method (the only rates available historically for Mississippi and the U. S.) have generally declined both nationally and in Mississippi during the school years beginning in 1993 and ending in 2005. Specifically, over this period, Mississippi's dropout rate declined from 6% to 2.84%, while the national rate declined from slightly over 5% to slightly under 4%.

During the 2005-2006 school year, 5,628 students dropped out of Mississippi's schools from all grades combined. The largest percentages of students dropped out in the ninth and tenth grades (each of these grades accounted for 20% of students dropping out in the 2005-2006 school year), followed by 18.46% of the total who dropped out in the eleventh grade. Dropouts in grades nine through twelve accounted for 73% of total dropouts in the 2005-2006 school year.

How does the dropout problem affect society?

The dropout problem affects society in terms of high personal and social costs. For example, individuals without a high school education are at greater risk than high school graduates of being unemployed, employed in low-wage jobs, imprisoned, and unhealthy.

Policymakers are concerned about dropouts because these individuals may be unable to enter the workforce with the necessary skills and education to meet the demands of the nation's global economy. Increasing the number of graduates with a quality education would strengthen the nation's economy and would reduce public and private expenditures on rectifying the shortcomings of an undereducated workforce.

Besides the economy being affected, the health and well-being of dropouts are affected as well. Evidence suggests that health and well-being of an individual drastically improve just by obtaining a high school diploma. Literature says that high school graduates live longer, are less likely to be teen parents, produce healthier and better-educated children, and rely less on social services. A healthier nation, both financially and physically, affects all Americans by reducing the tax burden and cost of government services.

How does the dropout problem affect Mississippi?

According to research estimates, if all of Mississippi's employed dropouts completed high school and earned the same annual median income as high school graduates, they would increase their income by $1.8 billion annually.

According to the Mississippi University Research Center, only about one-third of all high school dropouts in Mississippi work or seek work. Mississippi dropouts have a 70% higher unemployment rate than individuals that have a high school diploma. Mississippi's dropouts earn on average about $4,665 less annually than do high school graduates. Dropouts also affect the state's gross state earnings. MURC noted that in 2004, if all employed dropouts earned a high school diploma and increased their annual median income to the annual median income of a high school graduate, they would earn an additional $1.8 billion annually.

What have the federal government and Mississippi done to address our state's dropout problem?

Both the federal government and Mississippi have initiatives in place to prevent students from dropping out of school. Through related programs and federal and state legislation, the efforts in preventing dropouts are widespread and have been in existence for many years.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to several related, more specific questions, each addressed below.

What has the federal government done to address the dropout problem?

The federal government has provided states the opportunity for funding through programs that, for the most part, indirectly impact the dropout rate by addressing factors that put a student at risk of dropping out of school (e.g., Reading First Grants and Mathematics and Science Partnership Grants). Federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, has strengthened the federal government's efforts in keeping students in school.

What has the Mississippi Legislature done to address the dropout problem?

The Mississippi Legislature has passed laws that mandate dropout prevention programs and that create several offices responsible for the administration, implementation, and evaluation of dropout prevention efforts. Recent legislation requires that the state cohort graduation rate increase to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year.

What has the Mississippi Department of Education done to address the dropout problem?

MDE has issued a report on public school dropouts, staffed an Office of Dropout Prevention, created state dropout prevention plans and mandated district dropout prevention plans, and implemented an information system to track students through the school system.

What have the individual Mississippi school districts done to address the dropout problem?

School districts have dropout prevention programs in place and MDE has required the districts to develop dropout prevention plans in accordance with state dropout prevention plans, both in 2004 and 2007.

Has the early implementation phase of Mississippi's current dropout prevention effort provided a foundation for success?

While MDE's current dropout prevention effort provides the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals and nationally recognized strategies and best practices, elements of the department's program implementation pose concern. MDE did not evaluate the status and effectiveness of the districts' 2004 dropout prevention plans, which would have helped to ensure the most efficient use of those plans in identifying and adopting best practices, to reduce confusion between existing plans and the requirements of the new plan, and to limit duplication of effort between the existing plans and the new plan. PEER found no clearly defined strategy to ensure districts' careful adherence to adopted best practices or to rigorous, ongoing program evaluation and oversight to ensure acceptable outcomes.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to related, more specific questions, each addressed below.

What are the nationally recognized best practices in preventing dropouts?

Organizations such as the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and the Southern Regional Education Board have identified programs proven

through research to be effective in reducing at-risk behaviors associated with dropping out of school and have used the knowledge gained through successful implementation of these programs to develop broad "strategies" for states to use in dropout prevention.

What steps need to be taken to ensure that best practices are implemented as effective district dropout prevention programs?

While MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention has supplied the districts with the best practices in dropout prevention from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University and the Southern Regional Education Board, the successful development and implementation of effective dropout prevention programs require careful adherence to established best practices as well as rigorous and ongoing program evaluation and oversight.

Has MDE taken the necessary steps to ensure that the districts successfully implement and/or develop their own best practices in dropout prevention?

While MDE has provided the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals, strategies, and best practices, it has not evaluated the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices. Without ensuring that program content and implementation adhere to best practices, the state cannot maximize its effectiveness in addressing its dropout problem. Further, because MDE has not provided the districts with cost data for the fifty "exemplary" programs identified by the NDPC/N, the districts cannot maximize their use of scarce resources in addressing their dropout problems.

How do the state's current dropout prevention efforts interface with initiatives already in place?

Prior to the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan, initiatives were already in place at both the state and district level. MDE has not evaluated them to determine whether a new effort was needed or to ensure that the new initiative would be advancing the state's progress towards achieving an 85% graduation rate by the 2018-2019 school year.

Both the districts and MDE have had dropout prevention initiatives in place since the Education Reform Act of 1982 and the current MDE effort is utilizing some of the same dropout prevention programs already in place in the school districts. Despite the fact that these measures already existed in individual districts, MDE is mandating new district plans instead of evaluating and building on previous efforts.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Education should evaluate the current dropout prevention programs to ensure that the programs are implemented correctly and to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of each program in meeting its specific program objectives.

    a. The Office of Dropout Prevention should evaluate the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices.

    b. The Office of Dropout Prevention should provide the districts with cost and cost-effectiveness data on the fifty exemplary programs identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

    c. The Office of Dropout Prevention should focus on the school districts with the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates in the state and provide assistance in implementing new dropout prevention programs that conform to best practices and in evaluating current measures in place.

    d. The Office of Dropout Prevention should immediately draft criteria for evaluating the district dropout prevention plans to aid the districts in understanding what is expected in the plans that are due beginning in February 2008.

2. The Legislature should amend MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) to require the Office of Dropout Prevention to report annually to the Legislature the following:

    a. a list of the districts whose graduation, dropout, and completion rates have increased or decreased the most (beginning on January 1, 2009);

    b. which districts are achieving their goals and which are not reaching the objectives set forth by the districts

in the district plans (beginning on January 1, 2010); and,

c. what is being done in the school districts with the highest dropout rates and the lowest graduation rates to increase the graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate (beginning on January 1, 2009).

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A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program

Introduction

In response to a legislative inquiry, the PEER Committee reviewed the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Dropout Prevention's implementation of a statewide public school dropout prevention program. PEER conducted the review pursuant to the authority granted by MISS. CODE ANN. Section 5-3-57 et seq. (1972).

Scope and Purpose

During its 2006 Regular Session, the Legislature established the Office of Dropout Prevention within the Department of Education (MDE), effective July 1, 2006. The Legislature directed this office to work with the state's public school districts to establish dropout prevention plans and programs designed to increase the statewide ninth through twelfth grade cohort graduation rate from 60.8% (during the 2004-2005 school year) to 85% (by the 2018-2019 school year).

While the office was only one year into a thirteen-year program at the time of PEER's review, because the state and districts had been actively engaged in dropout prevention efforts since passage of the Education Reform Act in 1982, PEER determined that a review of the efforts of the newly created office could benefit both the department and the Legislature in efforts to reduce the state's public school dropout rates.

PEER focused its review on addressing the following questions:

- What is the dropout problem nationally and in Mississippi?

- What have the federal government and Mississippi done to address our state's dropout problem?

- Has the early implementation phase of Mississippi's current dropout prevention effort provided a foundation for success?

Method

In conducting this review, PEER:

- reviewed relevant sections of federal and state laws, rules, and regulations;

- analyzed dropout prevention program documents and materials at the state and district levels from both current and previous dropout prevention efforts;

- interviewed Department of Education and school district staff. For exploratory purposes, PEER conducted a purposive sample of public school districts, ensuring that the sample included districts with low and high dropout rates from diverse geographical areas. The purpose of the sample was to identify any problems with implementation of MDE's current dropout prevention program from the districts' perspective. PEER incorporated this information into its analysis of the problems districts reported.;

- attended one of MDE's three regional training sessions for the purpose of observing the adequacy of program content in explaining how to conduct a needs assessment and develop a dropout prevention plan;

- attended a legislative budget hearing and a legislative task force meeting; and,

- reviewed and analyzed current literature and research focusing on the dropout problem.

Chapter 1: What is the dropout problem nationally and in Mississippi?

While U. S. and Mississippi dropout rates have declined slightly over the past decade, the personal and social costs of any individual dropping out of school are high. Further, Mississippi's statewide four-year cohort dropout rate of 26.6% for the school year ending in 2005 masks significant variation in the rates from district to district, with eleven of the state's 152 public school districts having four-year cohort dropout rates in excess of 40% and ten of the districts having dropout rates of less than 9%.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to several related, more specific questions:

- How do education policymakers define *dropout* and related terms (e. g., *completer*)?

- How do education policymakers calculate the dropout rate and related rates (e. g., *graduation rate*)?

- What are the dropout and related rates and historical trends for the U. S. and for Mississippi?

- How does the dropout problem affect society?

- How does the dropout problem affect Mississippi?

The following sections address each of these questions.

How do education policymakers define *dropout* and related terms?

The definitions of "dropout" and related terms are important because who is included in each term affects the associated rate calculations.

This section includes definitions of the following key terms that education policymakers measure and discuss in analyzing the public school dropout problem:

- dropout;

- graduate;

- completer; and,

- truant.

Dropout

In October 2003, MDE adopted the following National Center for Education Statistics definition of a dropout:

A dropout is an individual who:

> *1. Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;*

2. *Was not enrolled in school at the beginning of the current school year;*

3. *Has not graduated from high school or completed a State or District approved educational program (GED program);*

4. *And does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:*

   a. *Transfer to another public school district, private school, or State or District approved educational program (GED program);*

   b. *Temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness;*

   c. *Or death.*

Also, MDE excludes a student enrolled in any of the following programs from being counted as a dropout:

- home-school programs, provided the parents of a home-schooled student have completed and filed a certificate of enrollment in such a program with the school attendance officer;

- non-public/private school programs for students with a physical disability or illness, a drug or alcohol problem, or an emotional or psychological problem who have been placed in a private hospital or other private institution for treatment;

- any state-operated schools such as East Columbia or the Williams School at Oakley (students placed in these schools are considered transfers to another public school in Mississippi); and,

- certificate completion programs, including General Education Diploma (GED) preparatory classes at a district-sponsored alternative school and approved special education curriculums.

As previously noted, MDE does not count students completing state- or district-approved GED programs as dropouts; however, as will be discussed below, federal rules and regulations require the department to count students participating in Adult Basic Education GED programs as dropouts.

State- or district-approved GED programs require students to complete twenty hours per week of academic

instruction with an additional 7.5 hours per week of any of the following:

- job readiness or employability skills;

- career exploration;

- vocational program;

- part-time employment;

- meaningful community service work.

Federal funding regulations require any student attending an Adult Basic Education GED program to have been counted as a dropout prior to participating in the program.

Federal funding regulations require any student attending an Adult Basic Education GED program to have been counted as a dropout prior to participating in the program. Specifically, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, Adult Education and Literacy Act, §203 (b), stipulates that in order to receive funding under the act, individuals who receive adult education services through an Adult Basic Education GED program must not be enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school by state law.

Graduate

MDE defines a graduate as a student who has earned a standard diploma--i. e., a diploma that is awarded to a student who has met all of the requirements established by the local board of education and by the state Board of Education. For official reporting purposes, this term does not include special education students who have earned either a certificate of attendance or an occupational diploma or students who have earned a GED.

It is important to note, however, that in calculating the graduation rate and corresponding benchmarks for the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan, MDE included special education students receiving occupational diplomas as graduates.

Completer

Graduates, special education students earning occupational diplomas, special education students earning certificates of attendance, and students earning a GED through a district or state approved program are counted as completers.

Truant

A truant is defined as a student who has accumulated five or more unexcused absences in a school year, excluding suspension and expulsion days. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, truancy rates and excessive absenteeism are early indicators that a student will drop out of school.

How do education policymakers calculate the dropout rate and related rates?

While several methods exist for calculating dropout and related rates, the cohort or longitudinal method is considered the best method because it shows the percentage of students who dropped out, completed, or graduated from a given graduating class during a specified period, usually ninth through twelfth grade or seventh through twelfth grade.

This section will discuss the primary methods of calculating graduation, completion, dropout, and truancy rates.

Primary Methods of Calculating the Rates

Dropout Rate Calculations

According to a 2000 report issued by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) entitled *Reducing Dropout Rates*:

> *The various methods of calculating dropout rates convey different messages that may result in different decisions about which strategies to follow. Policy-makers need to be aware of the different ways that dropout rates are calculated and the advantages of each method.*

In a state such as Mississippi with an information system designed to track individual students, the longitudinal or cohort method of reporting dropouts is most consistent with the public's perception of what the dropout rate should measure.

Exhibit 1 on page 7 describes the three primary methods of calculating dropout rates and the advantages and disadvantages of each method, according to the SREB. As the exhibit shows, in a state such as Mississippi with an information system designed to track individual students (see discussion of MSIS on page 27), the longitudinal or cohort method is the method of reporting dropouts that is most consistent with the public's perception of what the dropout rate should measure.

Using dropout data reported for Mississippi for the 2004-2005 school year, Exhibit 2, page 8, illustrates the variation

in dropout rates yielded by different calculation methods and ranges of grade levels to compute the rates.

Exhibit 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of the Primary Methods of Calculating Dropout Rates

Type of Dropout Rate	Method of Calculation	Advantages	Disadvantages
Longitudinal or Cohort	divide the number of students who drop out by the number in the original class, adjusted for transfer students; while a cohort is usually measured from the 9th grade through the 12th grade, it can also be measured from the 7th grade through the 12th grade	+the method is most consistent with the public's perception of dropouts +accounts for students who leave school one year and return later +accounts for students who are retained in grade nine but stay in school and graduate later than their original classmates	-states may not have information systems to track individual students as they progress from grade to grade -absent of information systems, cohort rates often are estimated based on a sample of students or projected based on "annual" dropout rates.
Annual Event	percentage of students who are enrolled in May or June who do not graduate and do not return to school in September or October	+easy to calculate +a practical way to determine the number of students who leave school each year	-only includes students who drop out each year; it may understate the dropout problem over four years -the calculation is affected by the range of grade levels used to compute the rates
Status	percentage of a particular age group who are not enrolled in school and who do not have a high school diploma	+may be the most appropriate rate for comparing state results and for determining changes over time	-like all estimates based on samples, the percentages have some errors -not available for individual schools and school districts

SOURCE: Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series, *Reducing Dropout Rates*

Exhibit 2: Variation in Dropout Rates Yielded by Various Calculation Methods and Ranges of Grade Levels, 2004-2005 School Year

Method of Dropout Rate Calculation	Range of Grade Levels Used in Computation	School Year	Dropout Rate
Annual Event	1-12, including self-contained special education and secondary GED students	2004-2005	1.13%[a]
Annual Event	9-12	2004-2005	2.84%[b]
Longitudinal or Cohort	9-12	Cohort entering the 9th grade in the 2001-2002 school year	26.6%[c]

SOURCES:

[a]MDE 2004-2005 Superintendent's Annual Report, Pupil Data-Dropouts.

[b]PEER calculated this rate using MDE's data for the 2004-2005 school year by dividing the number of 9th-12th grade dropouts by Net First Month enrollments. (See Exhibit 4, page 14.)

[c]MDE "Estimated Graduation, Completion and Dropout Counts and Rates Based on Approved Procedures for Tracking a Cohort of Students Over 4 Years" (Final Report).

Graduation Rate Calculations

There are three primary ways of calculating the graduation rate: *traditional*, *cohort*, and *averaged freshman*.

Traditional Graduation Rate

The traditional graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students receiving a traditional diploma in a given school year by the number of students who were enrolled in the ninth grade four years earlier. This rate excludes the following:

- self-contained special education students;
- students retained;
- students who were enrolled at the end of a school year but who were not enrolled at the beginning of the next school year;
- state- or district-approved GED program completers; and,
- special education students who earn a certificate of attendance.

This rate does not track individual students, but provides annual data for all students enrolled.

Cohort Graduation Rate

The cohort graduation rate is calculated in the same manner as the cohort dropout rate (refer to the method of calculation for the longitudinal or cohort rate explained in Exhibit 1 on page 7), with the numerator being the number of students in the cohort receiving a traditional diploma (rather than the number of students who dropped out).

Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate

The averaged freshman graduation rate is calculated by estimating the proportion of public high school freshmen that graduate with a regular diploma four years after starting the 9th grade. It provides a measure of the extent to which public high school students graduate in four years.

Differences in Graduation Rate Calculations

The primary reason for the variation in the graduation rates based on the different methods of calculating them is that the denominator for the traditional rate is smaller than the denominator for the other rates because it excludes several categories of students.

The primary reason for the variation in the rates based on the different methods of calculating them is that the denominator for the traditional rate is smaller than the denominator for the other rates because it excludes several categories of students (refer to page 8 for exclusions).

As shown in Exhibit 3, page 10, during the 2003-2004 school year, Mississippi's averaged freshman graduation rate was 62.7%, while Mississippi's cohort graduation rate beginning with ninth graders in 2001-2002 was 60.8%. (Data was not available for the same school years for both methods and cohort graduation rate data is not available prior to 2005.)

Completion Rate Calculation

The two primary methods of calculating the completion rate are the *status* method and the *cohort* method.

Status Completion Rate

The status completion rate denotes the percentage of individuals who are not in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent credential. This rate does not take into account when the credential was achieved.

Cohort Completion Rate

The cohort completion rate is calculated the same way as the cohort dropout rate (refer to the method of calculation for the longitudinal or cohort rate explained in Exhibit 1 on page 7), with the numerator being the number of students in the cohort who are completers (rather than the number of students who dropped out). Mississippi's four-year cohort completion rate for the cohort beginning with ninth graders in 2001-2002 was 67%. Mississippi's cohort completion and dropout rates as presented in Appendix A on page 49 do not add to 100% because of those students who are still in school past their expected completion date (i. e., students who are not dropouts but have not yet completed school).

Truancy Rate Calculation

The truancy rate is calculated by dividing the number of students with five or more unexcused absences in a school year by the total enrollment. Mississippi's truancy rate for the 2005-2006 school year was 31.8%.

Exhibit 3: Variation in Graduation Rates Yielded by Various Calculation Methods

Method of Graduation Rate Calculation	School Year	Graduation Rate
Traditional	2004-2005	85.12%[a]
Longitudinal or Cohort	Cohort beginning with students entering the 9th grade in the 2001-2002 school year	60.8%[b]
Averaged Freshman	2003-2004*	62.7%[c]

*Averaged freshman graduation rate data for Mississippi is for the 2003-2004 school year because 2004-2005 school year data was not available for this method.

SOURCES:

[a]2004-2005 Mississippi Report Card (Traditional Data).

[b]MDE's "Estimated Graduation, Completion and Dropout Counts and Rates Based on Approved Procedures for Tracking a Cohort of Students Over 4 Years" (Final Report).

[c]National Center for Education Statistics.

Rate Calculations: Reporting Requirements

Federal Requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to calculate and report graduation and annual event dropout rates as discussed below. According to the NCLB, Part A-Improving Basic Programs operated by Local Educational Agencies, Section 1111(2)(C):

> *'Adequate yearly progress' shall be defined by the State in a manner that—(vi) in accordance with subparagraph (D), includes graduation rates for public secondary school students (defined as the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years). . . .*

Also, the NCLB Act, Part H-School Dropout Prevention, Section 1829-School Dropout Rate Calculations, states that:

> *For purposes of calculating an annual school dropout rate under this subpart, a school shall use the annual event dropout rate for students leaving a school in a single year determined in accordance with the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data.*

Reporting Requirements in Mississippi Law

State law establishes a goal of increasing Mississippi's cohort graduation rate to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-21-9 (d) (1972), which went into effect in 2003, requires MDE to report annually the cohort graduation and dropout rates to the Legislature "based on Grades 7 through 12 and Grades 9 through 12 cohort groups, statewide and by district." Also, as discussed on page 24, MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) establishes a goal of increasing Mississippi's cohort graduation rate to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year. As discussed on page 9, the state's cohort graduation rate for the cohort of students beginning with ninth graders in 2001-2002 was 60.8%.

What are the dropout and graduation rates and historical trends for the U. S. and for Mississippi?

During the school years beginning in 1993 and ending in 2005, dropout rates, calculated according to the annual event method (cohort data is not

available over this period), have generally declined both nationally and in Mississippi, while averaged freshman graduation rates have remained fairly constant since the 1990-1991 school year. However, it is important to note that there is wide variation in the dropout, graduation, and completion rates by individual public school district in Mississippi.

Historical Trends in U. S. and Mississippi Dropout and Graduation rates

As shown in Exhibit 4 on page 14, dropout rates calculated according to the annual event method (the only rates available historically for Mississippi and the U. S.) have generally declined both nationally and in Mississippi during the school years beginning in 1993 and ending in 2005. Specifically, over this period, Mississippi's dropout rate declined from 6% to 2.84%, while the national rate declined from slightly over 5% to slightly under 4%.

As shown in Exhibit 5 on page 15, national and Mississippi averaged freshman graduation rates have remained fairly constant over the school years beginning in 1990 and ending in 2004 at approximately 70% and 60%, respectively.

Current Dropout, Graduation and Completion Rate Data for Mississippi

Unofficial estimates[1] of graduation, dropout, and completion cohort rates became available in Mississippi for the first time statewide and by individual school districts for the school year ending in 2004-2005. Appendix A on page 49 shows each school district's four-year cohort graduation, dropout, and completion rates for the cohort beginning with ninth graders in 2001-2002.

Mississippi's estimated dropout rates vary significantly by district, ranging from 3.6% to 61.7%.

As Appendix A shows, estimated dropout rates vary significantly by district, ranging from 3.6% in Enterprise to 61.7% in Canton. Estimated graduation and completion rates follow a similar pattern, ranging from lows of 27.3% and 29.1%, respectively, in Canton to highs of 92.5% and 96.2%, respectively, in Enterprise. Only four school districts are above an 85% estimated graduation rate and approximately fifty-nine school districts have an estimated dropout rate of 31% or more. Refer to Appendix B, page 52, for maps depicting the individual school districts and

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[1] The rates are unofficial because the State Board of Education has not adopted the cohort method of calculating dropout, graduation, and completion rates for official reporting purposes. The cohort rates are estimates because it is unknown whether some of the students in the cohort who left school during the period of school years 2001-2002 through 2004-2005 dropped out of school or transferred to another school (and would therefore not be counted as a dropout). In order to account for the cohort students with an unknown final disposition, MDE developed a procedure for apportioning the students into transfer and dropout estimates based on percentages from the known status students who did not return to school.

corresponding ranges for the districts' estimated dropout, graduation, and completion rates.

During the 2005-2006 school year, 5,628 students dropped out of Mississippi's schools from all grades combined.

As shown in Exhibit 6 on page 16, during the 2005-2006 school year, 5,628 students dropped out of Mississippi's schools from all grades combined. Also, as shown in the exhibit, the largest percentages of students dropped out in the ninth and tenth grades (each of these grades accounted for 20% of students dropping out in the 2005-2006 school year), followed by 18.46% of the total who dropped out in the eleventh grade. Dropouts in grades nine through twelve accounted for 73% of total dropouts in the 2005-2006 school year.

Appendix C on page 60 shows the reported reasons that the 5,628 students dropped out during the 2005-2006 school year. As Appendix C shows, of the reasons listed for dropping out, the highest percentage of students (approximately 28%) reported dropping out to attend a GED program that was not state- or district-approved, followed by approximately 23% of students reporting that they dropped out because they had reached their seventeenth birthday and were no longer required to stay in school by the compulsory school attendance law. It is also important to note that 11.44% of students dropped out for unknown reasons and an additional 9.31% of students counted as dropouts were listed under the "reason" category of "whereabouts unknown."

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, Mississippi ranks 50th in the nation based on the percent of the population ages twenty-five and over who had a high school diploma or its equivalent in 2005.

According to the National Education Association and the National Center for Education Statistics, Mississippi ranks 41st in the nation based on a 2006 averaged freshman graduation rate of 64.6%. The 1st ranked state, Minnesota, has an averaged freshman graduation rate of 90.1%. In addition, Mississippi has the 22nd highest annual event dropout rate and is tied with three other states with a 3.9% annual event dropout rate in 2002. Finally, according to the U. S. Census Bureau, Mississippi ranks 50th based on the percent of the population ages twenty-five and over who had a high school diploma or its equivalent in 2005. Only 78.5% of Mississippi's population twenty-five and over had a high school diploma or its equivalent, compared to the highest-ranked state Wyoming, with 91.3% of its population having a high school diploma or its equivalent. (Appendices D through F, pages 61 through 66, show state rankings based on the 2006 averaged freshman graduation rate, the 2002 annual event dropout rate, and the percentage of the state's population twenty-five and over in 2005 who have completed high school.)

Exhibit 4: Annual Event Dropout Rates, U. S. and Mississippi, for School Years 1993-94 through 2004-2005
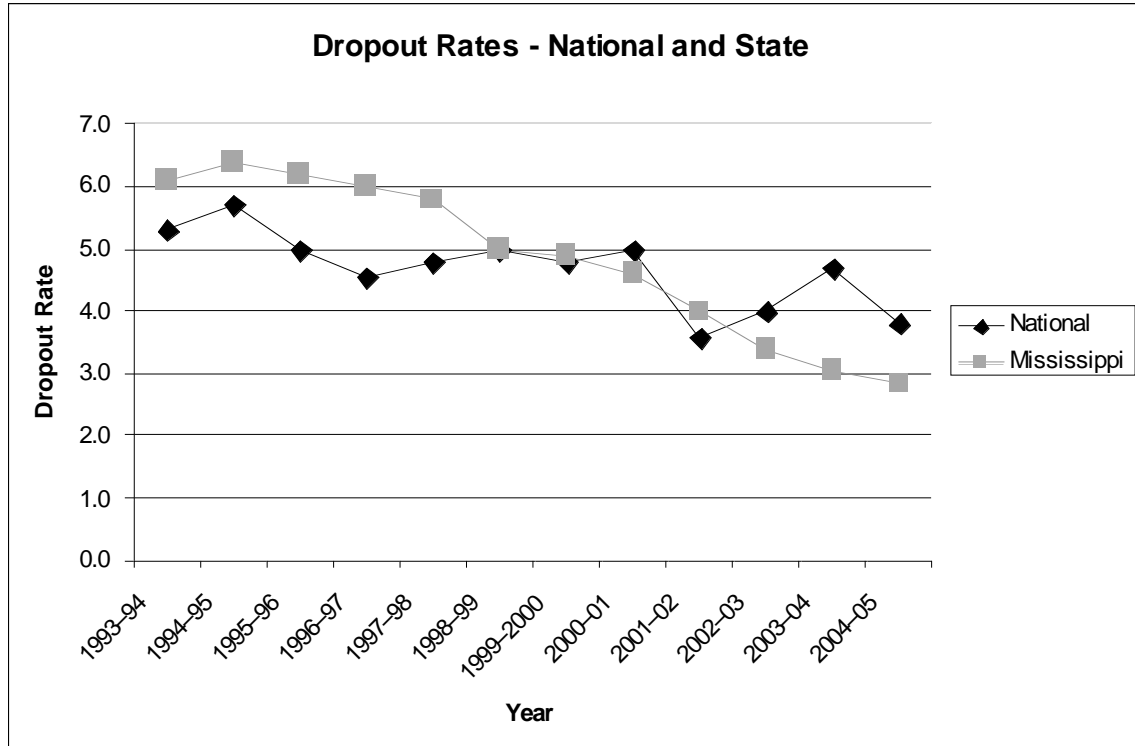
NOTE: National data reflects grades 10-12, state data reflects grades 9-12.

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Local Education Agency Universe Survey Dropout and Completion Data File;" U. S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. Regarding Mississippi data for the 2002-2003 school year through the 2004-2005 school year, PEER calculated these rates by dividing the number of 9th-12th grade dropouts by the Net First Month enrollments.

Exhibit 5: Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates, U. S. and Mississippi, School Years 1990-1991 through 2003-2004
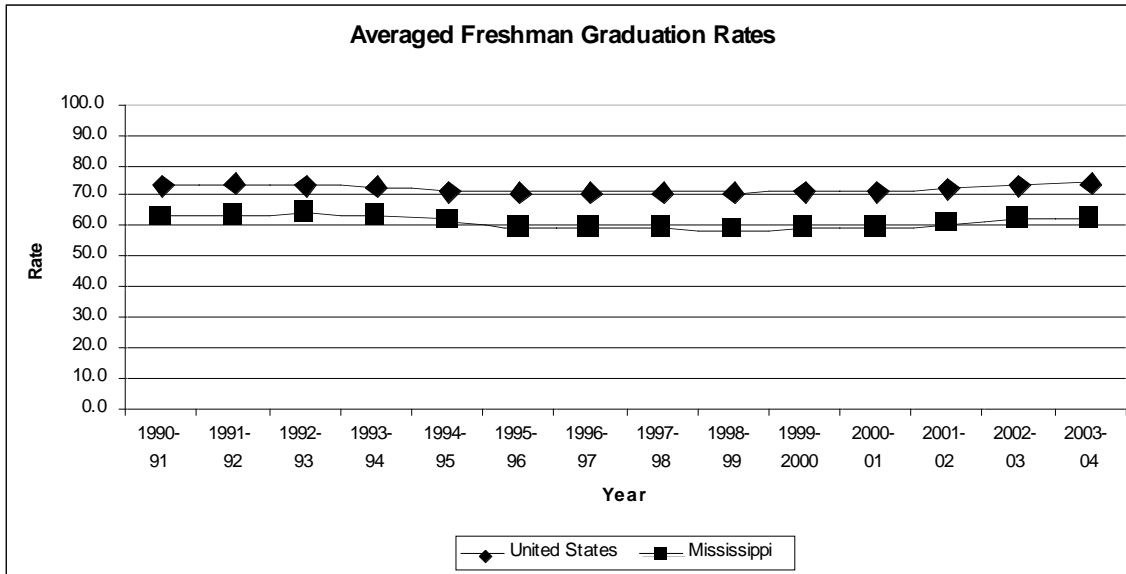
Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education" and "The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for Public High Schools From the Common Core of Data."

Exhibit 6: Dropouts by Grade in Mississippi for the 2005-06 School Year

Grade	Total	Percentage of All Dropouts
Elementary self-contained special education classroom	7	0.12%
1	19	0.34%
2	27	0.48%
3	20	0.36%
4	27	0.48%
5	35	0.62%
6	89	1.58%
7	213	3.78%
8	293	5.21%
Secondary self-contained special education classroom	262	4.66%
Secondary GED program	536	9.52%
9	1,119	19.88%
10	1,126	20.01%
11	1,039	18.46%
12	816	14.50%
State Totals	**5,628**	**100.00%**

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education.

How does the dropout problem affect society?

The dropout problem affects society in terms of high personal and social costs. For example, individuals without a high school education are at greater risk than high school graduates of being unemployed, employed in low-wage jobs, imprisoned, and unhealthy.

Policymakers are concerned about dropouts because these individuals may be unable to enter the workforce with the necessary skills and education to meet the demands of the nation's global economy. Increasing the number of graduates with a quality education would strengthen the nation's economy and would reduce public and private expenditures currently spent on rectifying the shortcomings of an undereducated workforce.

Besides the economy being affected, the health and well-being of dropouts are affected as well. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet 2003, evidence suggests that the health and well-being of an individual drastically improve just by obtaining a high school diploma. Literature says that high school graduates live longer, are less likely to be teen parents, produce healthier and better-educated children and rely less on social services. A healthier nation, both financially and physically, affects all Americans by reducing the tax burden and cost of government services.

Given the statistics and negative outcomes associated with dropping out of high school, some of which are presented in the following paragraphs, lowering the dropout rate should be a goal of educators and policymakers.

The Impact of Dropouts: the Economy and Personal Income

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, in 2002 six million students throughout America were at risk of dropping out of school. To a March 14, 2006, question regarding dropouts that was posed to the U. S. Secretary of Education on the department's website, Secretary Margaret Spellings responded that dropouts cost the nation more than $260 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over the students' lifetimes. The 2003 Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet stated that American businesses currently spend more than $60 billion each year on training, much of that on remedial reading, writing, and mathematics, skills employees should have achieved in school. Specifically, the article states that Michigan spends about $222 million annually to correct the shortcomings of workers who leave high school without basic skills.

Regarding personal income, according to a 2006 report by the Southern Education Foundation, in 2002, high school graduates earned 48 cents to every college graduate's dollar and high school dropouts earned only 29 cents per dollar. According to a November 2003 Alliance for Education Fact Sheet, the U. S. Department of Education reported in 2001 that only forty percent of adults who dropped out of high school are employed, compared to sixty percent of adults that have completed high school and eighty percent for those with a bachelor's degree.

The Impact of Dropouts: Crime, Health, and Well-Being

A 1995 report by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory notes that the rate of engagement in high-risk

behaviors such as sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide has been found to be significantly higher among dropouts.

A 2003 report by the Alliance for Excellent Education stated that high school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetimes. As a consequence, a considerable cost is imposed on all levels of government. This research suggests that a one percent increase in high school graduation rates would save approximately $1.4 billion in costs associated with incarceration, or about $2,100 for each male high school graduate. A one-year increase in average education levels would reduce arrest rates by 11 percent.

Literature also suggests that higher levels of schooling among parents are positively correlated with better levels of health in infants and children.

Completion of high school is also associated with general health. A 2007 Alliance for Excellent Education Issue Brief states that America could save more than $17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for health care for the uninsured by graduating all students. A 2003 Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet states that high school graduation is also positively related to lower mortality rates, and lower medical-care time and money expenditures. Literature also suggests that higher levels of schooling among parents are positively correlated with better levels of health in infants and children--specifically, lower rates of infant mortality and low birth weight.

How does the dropout problem affect Mississippi?

According to research estimates, if all of Mississippi's employed dropouts completed high school and earned the same annual median income as high school graduates, they would increase their income by $1.8 billion annually.

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF), a nonprofit organization aimed at ensuring fairness and excellence in education for low-income students from preschool through higher education, conducted a study to identify the importance of education to Mississippi's economy. The study maintained that Mississippi's low levels of education have contributed heavily to the disparity in the state's per capita income and the nation's.

A study by the Southern Education Foundation maintained that Mississippi's low levels of education have contributed heavily to the disparity in the state's per capita income and the nation's.

According to the SEF, improvement in the state's education would create and attract more industries and businesses. Subsequently, more jobs would be created and more income would benefit the state. Education is Mississippi's primary driver for income and economic growth.

According to the Mississippi University Research Center (MURC), only about one-third of all high school dropouts in Mississippi work or seek work. Mississippi dropouts have a 70% higher unemployment rate than individuals

that have a high school diploma. Mississippi's dropouts earn on average about $4,665 less annually than do high school graduates. Dropouts also affect the state's gross state earnings. MURC noted that in 2004, if all employed dropouts earned a high school diploma and increased their annual median income to the annual median income of a high school graduate, they would earn an additional $1.8 billion annually.

Mississippi's dropouts earn on average about $4,665 less annually than do high school graduates.

Dropouts create many obstacles for the state. Dropouts decrease state income and sales tax revenue. They are much more likely to require government assistance. For example, MURC reports that high school dropouts are approximately 18% of Mississippi's population, but have a 29% probability of receiving Medicaid benefits.

Chapter 2: What have the federal government and Mississippi done to address our state's dropout problem?

Both the federal government and Mississippi have initiatives in place to prevent students from dropping out of school. Through related programs and federal and state legislation, the efforts in preventing dropouts are widespread and have been in existence for many years.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to several related, more specific questions:

- What has the federal government done to address the dropout problem?

- What has the Mississippi Legislature done to address the dropout problem?

- What has the Mississippi Department of Education done to address the dropout problem?

- What have the individual Mississippi school districts done to address the dropout problem?

The following sections address each of these questions.

What has the federal government done to address the dropout problem?

The federal government has provided states the opportunity for funding through programs that, for the most part, indirectly impact the dropout rate by addressing factors that put a student at risk of dropping out of school (e.g., Reading First Grants and Mathematics and Science Partnership Grants). Federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act has strengthened the federal government's efforts in keeping students in school.

Although a majority of federal programs incorporate measures that could indirectly affect students likely to drop out, at least one program was created with the purpose of supporting "effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in high schools with annual dropout rates that exceed their state average annual dropout rate." This federal initiative, called the School Dropout Prevention Program (previously the School Dropout Prevention Demonstration Program), awarded grants to state agencies to help reduce the dropout rates and keep students in school. While funds were not appropriated for the program in Fiscal Year 2007, Texas and Arizona each received $2.2 million in awards in FY 2006.

Other federal acts and programs have been utilized by states in their efforts to reduce dropouts. Refer to Appendix G on page 67 for a list of federal programs used by MDE in its dropout prevention efforts.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to report annual dropout rate data by the population's race and ethnicity.

One of the most widely known of the federal acts is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. This act provides "accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research." The federal government evaluates schools' yearly progress, which is an "individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math." This act requires states to report annual dropout rate data by the population's race and ethnicity.

MDE monitors whether federally funded education programs are being properly implemented in Mississippi. Individual school districts have primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with the programs' rules and regulations.

Other federal programs, such as Title X, Part C, Homeless Children and Youth Act, and the Even Start Family Literacy Program, may not have dropout prevention as a primary goal, but, according to a February 2002 GAO report, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network has advised that states should look to non-traditional dropout prevention sources for funding and target funding sources that are provided for specific risk areas, such as teenage pregnancy prevention, juvenile crime prevention, and alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

The Mississippi Department of Education monitors whether federally funded education programs are being properly implemented in Mississippi. While none of the federal programs MDE monitors explicitly target dropout prevention as their primary objective, these programs have the potential to reduce dropout rates to the extent that they achieve their desired outcomes of:

- ensuring that all students have an equitable opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic content standards and state academic assessments; and,

- closing the achievement gap between high and low performing students (especially between minority and non-minority students) and disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

The state's individual school districts have primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations governing these programs.

The Mississippi Legislature has passed laws that mandate dropout prevention programs and that create several offices responsible for the administration, implementation, and evaluation of dropout prevention efforts. Recent legislation requires that the state cohort graduation rate increase to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year.

The Education Reform Act of 1982 required MDE to create a performance-based accreditation system, which has required district dropout prevention plans since 2004.

Mississippi has had laws in place creating dropout prevention programs since at least 1982, with the passage of the Mississippi Education Reform Act. That act required MDE to create a performance-based accreditation system, which has required district dropout prevention plans since 2004.

In 1994, the Legislature created MDE's Office of Educational Accountability, which reported on public school dropouts in 2002. MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention, created by the Legislature in 2006, is responsible for dropout prevention and compulsory school attendance.

The Mississippi Education Reform Act and the Performance-Based Accreditation System

Presently, school attendance in Mississippi is mandatory for students ages six to seventeen.

The Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982 requires the Mississippi Department of Education to provide districts with assistance in creating dropout prevention programs and increases the compulsory school attendance age. According to the Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law, MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-91 (1972), school attendance is mandatory for students ages six to seventeen.

The act also required MDE to create a performance-based accreditation system. In making its accreditation decisions, the Commission on School Accreditation considers progress on both performance and process standards at individual schools.

Based on performance standards, the commission assigns a performance level (1 through 5, with 5 being the highest level) to each school. Performance standards are selected components of the statewide testing program and other output measures related to the performance of that individual school. The criteria used to determine a school's performance level is "meeting an annual growth expectation established for each individual school and the percent of students who are achieving at certain levels."

Process standards are used to determine a district's accreditation level (i. e., accredited, advised, probation, or withdrawn). Process standards address accepted educational principles and practices believed to promote educational quality, including staffing, certification, resources, instructional management, graduation requirements, and facilities.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-3-46 (c) (1972) requires MDE to provide technical assistance to those school districts that fall below a level 4 or 5 accreditation "in the development, implementation and administration of programs designed to keep children in school voluntarily and to prevent dropouts."

Creation of the Office of Educational Accountability

State law requires MDE's Office of Education Accountability to "assess both positive and negative impact on school districts of new education programs."

In 1994, MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-151-9 (1972) established the Office of Education Accountability within the State Department of Education. As part of its duties, the office is responsible for monitoring, reviewing, and providing information regarding programs developed under the Education Reform Act, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program Act of 1994, the Education Enhancement Fund, and subsequent education initiatives.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-151-9 (3) (c) (1972) also provides that the office will "assess both positive and negative impact on school districts of new education programs, including but not limited to The Mississippi Report Card and alternative school programs." Since its creation, the office has only released one report specifically on the topic of public school dropouts. The office released its report entitled Program Assessment Public School Dropouts on December 23, 2002.

Creation of the Office of Dropout Prevention

State law mandates the implementation of a statewide dropout prevention program by the Office of Dropout Prevention and requires each district to implement a separate dropout prevention program.

The Legislature created the Office of Dropout Prevention in 2006, codified in MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972), to be responsible for the administration of a statewide dropout prevention program and the Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement. Prior to the creation of the office, dropout prevention efforts were spread throughout the Department of Education with no central coordination of these efforts.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) created an office with the purpose of administering a statewide dropout prevention program. The Office of Dropout Prevention is now the centralized body with responsibility to decrease

the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate; however, there are many other programs under the control of other divisions within MDE. The primary purpose of these programs may not be dropout prevention, but these programs may have an indirect affect on the dropout and graduation rates (e. g., Even Start Family Literacy).

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) mandates the implementation of a statewide dropout prevention program by the Office of Dropout Prevention. This CODE Section also requires each district to implement a separate dropout prevention program. The office will approve the districts' dropout prevention plans by the 2008-2009 school year. These plans must also include ways to transition students in detention centers to their home school district.

That CODE section and the state's dropout prevention plan lay out the Legislature's intent in the creation of a statewide dropout prevention program. By the 2018-2019 school year, the statewide cohort graduation rate must increase to at least 85%.

What has the Mississippi Department of Education done to address the dropout problem?

MDE has issued a report on public school dropouts, staffed an Office of Dropout Prevention, created state dropout prevention plans and mandated district dropout prevention plans, and implemented an information system to track students through the school system.

Since passage of the Education Reform Act, MDE has taken steps to address the dropout problem in Mississippi. Through a report on public school dropouts, the staffing of an Office of Dropout Prevention, the creation of state and district dropout prevention plans, and implementation of an information system to track individual students' progression through the school system, MDE has attempted to bring to light and rectify the dropout situation in Mississippi.

2002 Report on Dropouts

According to MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-151-9 (2) (1972), assessments of programs established under the Education Reform Act of 1982 are the responsibility of the Office of Educational Accountability.

In 2002, MDE's Internal Program Monitoring Bureau in the Office of Educational Accountability conducted a "Program Assessment [of] Public School Dropouts." The purpose of the report is to "attempt to examine Mississippi's dropout experience, review data collection and reporting

procedures at the state and national levels, and recommend approaches to ensure more accurate reporting and preventative measures to address the dropout situation." The report provided an overview of the state of the dropout situation in Mississippi as of December 2002.

MDE's 2002 report on dropouts did not link the state's dropout and graduation rates to the effectiveness of the programs listed in the report.

According to that report, the state-level initiatives for dropout prevention are: Alternative School Programs, Alternative Education/GED, Support Our Students, Jobs for Mississippi Graduates, and the Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law. Descriptions of these programs and the number of students served/sites available are provided in that report, but a review of the effectiveness of the programs is missing from the analysis. The review did not link the dropout and graduation rates to the effectiveness of the five programs listed in the report.

The report provides findings and recommendations that resulted from the review of dropouts and reporting in the state. One of the recommendations made was to provide an office within MDE to focus on "analyzing dropout data, researching dropout prevention strategies and programs, and assisting school districts to develop a plan for implementing best practices to prevent students from dropping out of school."

Staffing of the Office of Dropout Prevention

MDE hired Dr. Sheril Smith as the first director of the Office of Dropout Prevention in September 2006. Prior to the hiring of Dr. Smith, MDE had already begun working on the 2007 statewide dropout prevention plan. Since assuming her position, Dr. Smith has provided the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals, strategies, and best practices. She has also conducted training sessions featuring nationally recognized speakers in the area of dropout prevention. She also provides technical assistance to districts upon request.

Dropout Prevention Plans

Accreditation Standard Requirements

A state accreditation process standard has required since 2004 that school districts develop dropout prevention plans and implement programs designed to lower dropout rates.

A process standard implemented in 1984 and amended over the years (currently Standard 17), has required since 2004 the school districts to "develop[] a dropout prevention plan and implement[] programs designed to keep students in school and to lower student dropout rates." Violations of standards by school districts could result in action taken by the Commission on School Accreditation.

2004 State Dropout Prevention Plans

Although district dropout prevention programs have been required by MDE's accreditation standards since 1984, it was not until 2004 that MDE created a statewide dropout prevention plan. The 2004 state plan was based upon recommendations made by the Office of Educational Accountability. The 2004 plan outlined the current dropout prevention initiatives, as well as future actions that will be utilized to meet the state's goals in reducing dropouts. Exhibit 7, page 27, lists the components incorporated into the 2004 dropout prevention plan.

In compliance with Standard 17 and the new state plan in 2004, district plans were created addressing the state plan's four stated goals based on what the district determined it could achieve during a specific school year.

In compliance with Standard 17 and the new state plan in 2004, district plans were also created addressing the state plan's four stated goals based on what the district determined it could achieve during a specific school year. These plans were data driven and each district was required to establish a baseline for each of the goals promulgated by MDE. Plans were to be updated annually to identify whether the district was meeting the targeted goals it set for itself and this information was then supposed to be submitted to MDE. Before updates could be submitted to MDE, Hurricane Katrina hit Mississippi, and plans were never required to be updated afterward. (See Appendix H, page 69, for a sample 2004 district dropout prevention plan.)

2007 Dropout Prevention Plans

MDE began drafting the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan shortly after the Legislature created the Office of Dropout Prevention in the 2006 Regular Session.

MDE began drafting the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan shortly after the Legislature passed Senate Bill 2602, 2006 Regular Session, which created the Office of Dropout Prevention. With the help of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and a task force made up of various stakeholders such as community organizations and business leaders, MDE created a new state dropout prevention plan with the components listed in Exhibit 8, page 28.

Exhibit 7: Components of MDE's 2004 State Dropout Prevention Plan

• **State and District Goals**:
   1. To increase the Average Daily Attendance for each school so that students
      experience a continuous opportunity to learn;
   2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience
      a continuous opportunity to learn;
   3. To reduce the dropout rate for each school so that students experience
      a continuous opportunity to learn; and
   4. To strengthen assets or reduce risk factors that have been linked to students
      dropping out of school.

• **History**: Brief introduction and history of dropout prevention efforts and legislation in Mississippi.
• **Departmental Goals**: Nine goals that MDE seeks to accomplish to reduce the dropout rate within the state. (See Appendix I, page 95, for the 2004 dropout prevention goals.)
• **Revision:** Clause which states that the "goals and objectives will be revised periodically according to identified needs."
• **Comprehensive School Reform**: 11 Components of comprehensive school reform from the U. S. Department of Education and are set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act and the Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Model. (See Appendix J, page 96, for the components.)
• **State Initiatives**: List of current state initiatives that have an impact on the dropout and graduation rates.
• **Rate Calculations**: Description of how dropout rates are calculated nationally and in Mississippi.
• **Dropout Prevention Resources**: List of resources that can be utilized in dropout prevention, such as the National At-Risk Education Network and the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education's Strategic Dropout Prevention Plan, 2003-2014.

Efforts to Ensure the Accuracy of Data (MSIS)

The Mississippi Student Information System tracks data on individual students over time. MDE uses the information contained in MSIS to calculate graduation, completion, and dropout rates.

In 2000, the Mississippi Department of Education developed and implemented the Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS). This system, which tracks data on individual students over time, includes information about students who drop out, withdraw, re-enter school, or transfer to other public school districts within the state. MDE uses the information contained in MSIS to calculate graduation, completion, and dropout rates.

The implementation of MSIS allowed MDE to calculate ninth through twelfth grade cohort rates, beginning with the student cohort that entered the ninth grade during the 2001-2002 school year. Implementation of MSIS will also allow MDE to calculate the seventh through twelfth grade cohort rates in the future.

Exhibit 8: Components of MDE's 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan

• **State Goals**: 1. To increase the graduation rate for 9-12 cohort classes on a systematic basis to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year; 2. To reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013; and, 3. To reduce the statewide dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013. (See Appendix K, page 97, for the three statewide goals.)
• **History**: Brief introduction and history of dropout prevention efforts and legislation in Mississippi.
• **15 Effective Strategies**: The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's 15 Effective Strategies are defined and current state initiatives are categorized into the 15 strategies. (See Appendix L, page 99, for the 15 Effective Strategies.)
• **State Implementation Goals:** Nine implementation goals and the dates each are to be accomplished are included. (See Appendix M, page 101, for the implementation goals.)
• **7 Critical Components**: 7 Critical Components that will be utilized at the state and local levels to develop programs to meet the state's three goals. (See Appendix N, page 107, for the Critical Components.)
• **Superintendent's Strategies**: The plan includes 5 Superintendent's Strategies "for making changes necessary to improve the educational system, economic development, and quality of life in this state dramatically." (See Appendix O, page 109, for the Superintendent's Strategies.)
• **Rate Calculations**: Rate calculations for the state and individual school districts are included.
• **Department Offices:** Dropout prevention programs run by various offices within MDE are included with a brief description of each.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education's State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

The accuracy of rates calculated by MDE depends on the accuracy and integrity of the information coded into MSIS by the individual school districts.

School districts are responsible for maintaining records and reporting every month through MSIS the status of every student within their district to MDE. The accuracy of any rates calculated by MDE depends on the accuracy and integrity of the information coded into MSIS by the individual school districts.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-37-7 (2) (1972) authorizes the State Auditor to establish policies and procedures to ensure the accuracy and reliability of student data used to determine state funding for local school districts, including, but not limited to:

a) On-site audits;

b) An auditing process that ensures the timeliness and accuracy of reports generated by school districts of this state regarding all student transactions;

c) An auditing process that provides for the timeliness, process and accuracy of the electronic transmission of all student data to

the Mississippi Department of Education, including, but not limited to, student enrollment, attendance, transportation, absenteeism, graduation and dropouts and other student data and administrative functions as deemed necessary;

d) An audit of the accuracy and validity of all student transactions using the Mississippi Student Information System;

e) An audit process that ensures the timeliness and accuracy of reports, other than student data, required for submission in accordance with state law and/or State Board of Education policies.

According to a 2006 State Auditor's report, 233 of the state's public schools did not have a verifiable process for approving monthly student data to ensure accuracy.

During the 2006-2007 school year, the Office of the State Auditor's Average Daily Attendance Division conducted examinations of the Mississippi Student Information System in all Mississippi public schools. The examinations were intended to determine whether schools could provide evidence of the following MSIS standards promulgated by MDE:

- the running of monthly "holding area" reports;

- documentation for each student's excused absence (i. e., verification of data reports conducted by the district);

- a verifiable process for approving attendance data to ensure accuracy;

- a verifiable process for approving monthly student data to ensure accuracy;

- written policies establishing a timeframe for releasing students in MSIS; and,

- written policies establishing the requirements for excused absences.

The Office of the State Auditor produced a report in 2006 that showed how many schools in each school district met each of the above standards. For example, according to the State Auditor's report, 233 of the state's public schools did not have a verifiable process for approving monthly student data to ensure accuracy.

What have the individual Mississippi school districts done to address the dropout problem?

School districts have dropout prevention programs in place and MDE has required the districts to develop dropout prevention plans in accordance with state dropout prevention plans, both in 2004 and 2007.

School districts currently have programs in place to reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school. These programs, which consist of both state and federal initiatives and programs created by the districts, have goals that will either directly or indirectly impact the districts' dropout and graduation rates.

In their 2004 dropout prevention plans, school districts organized their current programs based on the intended outcome or goal--e. g., increasing the Average Daily Attendance and reducing the dropout rate for each school.

While a school district may conclude that it needs to add new programs to prevent students from dropping out, some districts are restricted by the availability of necessary funding for new programs.

For example, programs implemented in Claiborne County School District, whose graduation rate for the 2001-2002 ninth grade cohort is 85.3%, include Family Involvement, which involves conferences with parents on how to comply with the School Attendance Law, and Parents as Teachers, which offers "group counseling and training sessions for expectant mothers and peer coaching for students in grades 9-12." (See Appendix H, page 69, for Claiborne County's 2004 dropout prevention plan.)

Current programs are being utilized to impact the dropout and graduation rates of the respective school districts. Some of these programs have been in place prior to the 2004 dropout prevention plans and may continue to be utilized in the new 2007 district plans. While a school district may conclude that it needs to add new programs to prevent students from dropping out, some districts are restricted by the availability of necessary funding for new programs. As a result, the core of the dropout prevention programs could be the same in the new district plans.

Chapter 3: Has the early implementation phase of Mississippi's current dropout prevention effort provided a foundation for success?

While MDE's current dropout prevention effort provides the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals and nationally recognized strategies and best practices, elements of the department's program implementation pose concern. MDE did not evaluate the status and effectiveness of the districts' 2004 dropout prevention plans, which would have helped to ensure the most efficient use of those plans in identifying and adopting best practices, to reduce confusion between existing plans and the requirements of the new plan, and to limit duplication of effort between the existing plans and the new plan. PEER found no clearly defined strategy to ensure districts' careful adherence to adopted best practices or to rigorous, ongoing program evaluation and oversight to ensure acceptable outcomes.

To obtain the answer to this question, PEER sought the answers to related, more specific questions:

- What are the nationally recognized best practices in preventing dropouts?

- What steps need to be taken to ensure that best practices are implemented as effective district dropout prevention programs?

- Has MDE taken the necessary steps to ensure that the districts successfully implement and/or develop their own best practices in dropout prevention?

- How do the state's current dropout prevention efforts interface with initiatives already in place?

The following sections address each of these questions.

Organizations such as the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and the Southern Regional Education Board have identified programs proven through research to be effective in reducing at-risk behaviors associated with dropping out of school and have used the knowledge gained through successful implementation of these programs to develop broad "strategies" for states to use in dropout prevention.

Over the past twenty years, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and the Southern Regional Education Board have devoted considerable time and effort to identifying ways of preventing students from dropping out of school. Their research has yielded specific programs proven to be effective in reducing the number of students who drop out of school as well as broad strategies based on the lessons learned from successful programs that states can use to reduce their dropout rates.

Effective Dropout Prevention Programs

Based on an extensive review of the research literature and its own observation of dropout prevention programs across the nation, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) has compiled a list of fifty "exemplary" programs proven to address particular risk factors associated with dropping out of school.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network has compiled a list of fifty "exemplary" programs proven to address particular risk factors associated with dropping out of school.

Appendix P on page 114 contains a brief description of ten of the fifty "exemplary" programs identified by the NDPC/N. PEER selected the ten programs solely to serve as examples of the model programs identified by the NDPC/N. For each of the selected programs, the appendix includes a brief program overview as well as a description of the research method used to document the program's effectiveness. For example, the "Check and Connect" program, successfully implemented in Minnesota, provides at-risk students with a monitor/mentor who is responsible for assessing levels of student engagement and implementing interventions individualized to student needs. According to four longitudinal studies using experimental and quasi-experimental design across all school levels, compared to students in control or comparison groups, students served by the program showed significant decreases in truancy, absenteeism, and dropout rates and increases in credit accrual and school completion.

In another example, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (VYP), which was successfully implemented in San Antonio, Texas, is a tutoring program that pairs at-risk elementary students with secondary students who are also

at risk. The goal of the program is to reduce dropout rates by improving the students' self-esteem and academic performance. The program was evaluated using a quasi-experimental design with a matched comparison group for up to two years after the program was implemented. Reading grades were significantly higher for students who participated in the program and they also showed significant improvement in their attitudes toward attending school. As a result, the dropout rate was lower for the students who completed the program.

In terms of broad categories of services/strategies used by the exemplary programs, the NDPC/N noted that the most common strategy used by the programs was life skills development (used by thirty programs), followed by family strengthening (twenty-three programs) and academic support and family therapy (ten programs each).

Strategies for Dropout Prevention

Strategies of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

Through its research into effective dropout prevention programs, in May 2005 the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network published its "Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention" (refer to Appendix L on page 99). The NDPC/N noted that it chose to focus on attendance problems and truancy because they are usually precursors to dropping out of school and because the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) placed an increased emphasis on attendance when it authorized its use as an additional indicator of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Although the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network published "Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention" in 2005, the "strategies" do not provide specific plans of action for school districts to follow.

The NDPC/N has grouped its "strategies" into the following four general categories: school and community perspective, early interventions, basic core strategies, and making the most of instruction. According to the NDPC/N, "positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies."

It should be noted that the NDPC/N's "strategies" do not provide specific plans of action for school districts to follow. Instead, they identify broad areas of focus found in the range of successful dropout prevention programs. For example, one of the NDPC/N's "strategies" is "family engagement." In expounding on the strategy, the NDPC/N states "Research consistently finds that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school." The "strategy" does not list the most successful ways of engaging a family that is not engaged. A district that has identified family engagement as a problem contributing to its dropout rate would have to either implement a research-proven program focusing on this

strategy or develop its own program according to the guidelines established by the NDPC/N (refer to discussion on page 35).

Strategies of the Southern Regional Education Board

The Southern Regional Education Board has developed ten strategies for improving high school graduation rates and student achievement. SREB has identified examples of action steps that states can take to implement the strategies.

In 2006, legislatures and educational leaders from twenty-six states participated in a forum that examined successful strategies for improving high school graduation rates and student achievement currently being employed in the nation's high schools. As a result of this forum, the Southern Regional Education Board has developed ten strategies for improving high school graduation rates and student achievement (see Appendix Q on page 119 for the ten strategies). Because these strategies do not specifically target dropout prevention, their primary focus is on academic issues (e. g., "Strategy 2: Getting students ready for challenging high school studies is the primary mission of middle school education"). As shown in Appendix Q, SREB includes examples of actions states can take to implement each of its ten strategies--e. g., an action step listed under Strategy 2 is: "Establish policies to increase annually the percentages of eight-graders taking and succeeding in pre-algebra and Algebra I." Another action step listed under Strategy 3 ("Focus attention on the middle grades to ninth grade transition") is to "improve the ninth-grade student to teacher ratio."

What steps need to be taken to ensure that best practices are implemented as effective district dropout prevention programs?

While MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention has supplied the districts with the best practices in dropout prevention from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University and the Southern Regional Education Board, the successful development and implementation of effective dropout prevention programs require careful adherence to established best practices as well as rigorous and ongoing program evaluation and oversight.

In its 2007 report entitled "Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report," the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) emphasizes the importance of proper implementation of best practices to program success.

According to the NDPC/N:

> *Once risk factors are identified, practitioners face the decision of which program or programs to implement to address these factors. The success of prevention efforts depends greatly on the types of programs*

used, making it crucial to select programs that have been proven effective for identified risk factors. Many programs, however are being used around the country with little or no knowledge about their development or actual program effects...Reliance on evidence-based programs and evaluation of programs being implemented can help ensure that the most effective programs are being used.

The NDPC/N identified the following important "lessons" learned from the research literature for practitioners implementing existing programs or developing their own:

1. *Multiple risk factors across several domains should be addressed whenever possible to increase the likelihood that the program will produce positive results.*
2. *Multiple strategies should be used to help assure program impact.*
3. *When adopting an existing program, research points to the need for these programs to be fully implemented and to be implemented as they were designed. . . .Any changes to the strategies or partial implementation of the program will alter the program outcomes.*
4. *Program planners who develop their own strategies need to use evidence-based strategies proven to impact the risk factors they are addressing and develop strategies based on best practice.*
5. *Whether adopting an existing program or developing a new one, practitioners need to use evidence-based strategies to evaluate programs to assure effectiveness. Programs should be evaluated and use behavioral outcome measures to monitor resulting reduction in problem behaviors and addition of positive behaviors. Evaluation is particularly crucial for those developing their own programs and strategies to make sure that the most effective strategies were selected and that they effectively address identified risk factors.*

In order to maximize the effectiveness of either an existing evidence-based program or a new program based on best practices, the NDPC/N also notes that "programs need to be implemented for a long enough period of time to have an impact on problem behaviors."

In addition to the critical implementation issues addressed by the NDPC/N, PEER notes that due to the financial constraints that all districts face, the districts need to

know the cost per student for each of the exemplary dropout prevention programs, as well as which of the exemplary dropout prevention programs are the most cost-effective.

Has MDE taken the necessary steps to ensure that the districts successfully implement and/or develop their own best practices in dropout prevention?

While MDE has provided the districts with materials on dropout prevention goals, strategies, and best practices, it has not evaluated the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices. Without ensuring that program content and implementation adhere to best practices, the state cannot maximize its effectiveness in addressing its dropout problem. Further, because MDE has not provided the districts with cost data for the fifty "exemplary" programs identified by the NDPC/N, the districts cannot maximize their use of scarce resources in addressing their dropout problems.

While staff of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network have categorized Mississippi's current state and federally funded dropout prevention programs into the Fifteen Effective Strategies, MDE has not researched and evaluated current programs to determine their conformance to best practices or the effect the programs have on the risk factors for dropping out of school. Although MDE does provide guidance when districts specifically request such, MDE has not supplied all of the 152 districts with the additional criteria needed to classify current dropout prevention programs properly according to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's Fifteen Effective Strategies. Without proper classification of programs, districts might not be aware of gaps in program coverage.

No Evaluation of Dropout Prevention Programs to Determine Conformance to Best Practices

MDE has not evaluated the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether the programs conform to best practices as identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network in its 2007 Technical Report.

As discussed on page 35, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N), in order for a program to be successful in reducing the number of students who drop out of school, the strategies used must "have been proven effective for identified risk factors." Also, "reliance on evidence-based programs and evaluation of programs being implemented can help ensure that the most effective programs are being used."

MDE has not evaluated the current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to the best practices identified by the NDPC/N in its 2007 Technical Report. Without this determination, the districts could be wasting valuable resources on programs that might not conform to best practices and might not achieve the desired outcome of a significant reduction in dropouts.

Because MDE has not evaluated current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices, districts could be wasting valuable resources on programs that might not achieve the desired outcome of a significant reduction in dropouts.

Also, the Office of Dropout Prevention has not provided the districts with much needed cost data on the fifty "exemplary" programs identified by the NDPC/N. Currently, any district interested in implementing one of the "exemplary" programs would have to obtain cost data either from the NDPC/N or directly from the program contact. It would be much more efficient for MDE to obtain the data and make it available to all districts rather than each of the state's 152 districts trying to obtain their own cost data.

MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention has not provided the districts with much needed cost data on the fifty "exemplary" programs identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

While the director of the Office of Dropout Prevention expressed concern to the districts that they might not be able to implement all of the components of any of the fifty "exemplary" programs because of monetary constraints, as noted on page 35, in its 2007 Technical Report, the NDPC/N cautioned, "when adopting an existing exemplary program, research points to the need for these programs to be fully implemented *and* to be implemented as they are designed. . . .Any changes to the strategies or partial implementation of the program will alter the program outcomes."

Vagueness in Criteria for Classifying Programs According to Different Strategies

MDE has not provided the districts with sufficient guidance to classify current dropout prevention programs properly according to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's Fifteen Effective Strategies, which could result in gaps in program coverage.

MDE has supplied the districts with two reports from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network that broadly define each of the 15 Effective Strategies and provide corresponding "exemplary" programs to be implemented at the district level. Based on PEER's analysis of these reports, school districts would not have sufficient information with which to classify current district dropout programs within the 15 Effective Strategies.

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the 15 Effective Strategies have the biggest impact on reducing dropouts when all of the strategies are utilized together within the school district. In order for the school district to ascertain whether each

of the strategies is represented in various dropout prevention programs, the districts must be able to classify each program under the correct strategy.

MDE has not taken a proactive approach to provide all of the districts with specific information regarding how they should classify current programs within the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's 15 Effective Strategies.

While the 2007 state plan, as well as the 2004 state plan, requires the districts to classify their dropout prevention programs according to the 15 Effective Strategies, MDE has not provided the districts with adequate criteria for placing programs within the strategies. As shown in Appendix L on page 99, the descriptions of the different strategies can encompass numerous initiatives, making it difficult to determine whether the districts are properly classifying their programs. Although MDE has conducted three regional training sessions (refer to discussion on page 41) and has offered additional assistance to districts at the districts' request, MDE has not taken a proactive approach to provide all of the districts with specific information regarding how they should classify current programs within the NDPC/N's 15 Effective Strategies.

By properly categorizing the programs, the district would be able to determine which of the broad strategies are missing from their dropout prevention efforts and whether new programs are needed to fill any gaps.

How do the state's current dropout prevention efforts interface with initiatives already in place?

Prior to the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan, initiatives were already in place at both the state and district level. MDE has not evaluated them to determine whether a new effort was needed or to ensure that the new initiative would advance the state's progress toward achieving an 85% graduation rate by the 2018-2019 school year.

Both the districts and MDE have had dropout prevention initiatives in place since the Education Reform Act of 1982 and the current MDE effort is utilizing some of the same dropout prevention programs that were already in place in the school districts. Despite the fact that these measures already existed in individual districts, MDE is mandating new district plans instead of evaluating and building on previous district plans.

New State Dropout Prevention Plans Duplicate Effort

In implementing MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80, MDE has required districts to create new dropout prevention plans rather than requiring the districts to review and amend their 2004 dropout prevention plans as needed. This requirement has created confusion and possibly unnecessary work for the districts.

Although the state and the districts are required to implement dropout prevention programs, plans were already in place prior to

the effective date of the statute. By the 2008-2009 school year, both MDE and each school district will have drawn up new plans with similar objectives and programs as the 2004 plans, albeit in a slightly different format.

The 2004 and 2007 state and district dropout prevention plans contain similar components and goals for dropout prevention.

Shortly after the passage of Senate Bill 2602, 2006 Regular Session, which created the Office of Dropout Prevention and is codified in MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972), an MDE task force worked with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network to create a new statewide dropout prevention plan. (See page 23 for discussion of the creation of the office.) According to the director of the Office of Dropout Prevention, her first task upon assuming the job of director in September 2006 was to create a new state dropout prevention plan that was approved by the Board of Education in February 2007. The 2004 and 2007 state and district dropout prevention plans contain similar components and goals for dropout prevention.

Both the 2004 and 2007 plans required the districts to classify their dropout prevention programs under the 15 Effective Strategies from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

While the goals of the 2007 state dropout prevention plan seek to reduce the truancy and dropout rates by a certain percentage statewide, the 2004 plan sought to reduce the two rates based on benchmarks the districts believed they could meet within their communities. Also, the two plans share similar goals that are targeted at reducing the dropout rate. For example, the 2004 plan sets a goal of having all Mississippi students taught by highly qualified teachers and requires all schools to "reach high standards, attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics." The Superintendent's Strategies in the 2007 plan include goals of increasing the "quality and quantity of teachers" and the "rigor of the curriculum and assessment system" (refer to Appendix O, page 109, for the Superintendent's Strategies). Both plans required the districts to classify their dropout prevention programs under the 15 Effective Strategies from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

The 2004 district dropout prevention plans detailed the programs and activities being utilized by the districts to address the four goals of the 2004 state plan (see discussion of the goals on page 26). Corresponding performance indicators (such as reducing the dropout rate by .54%) and baseline data (from a then-current dropout rate of .68%) were required in connection with the dropout prevention programs (see Appendix H, page 69, for a sample 2004 district dropout prevention plan). This information was formatted into a chart that can now be found in a similar format in the new template for the current district plans, minus the requirement that the program's specific activities be addressed.

Instead of asking the districts to review their 2004 plans and amend them as needed, MDE mandated the creation of

new plans in 2007 to address the new state initiative. No assessment was conducted prior to the creation of the 2007 State Dropout Prevention Plan to determine whether the current initiative was working or whether a new initiative would be more effective. Although MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) establishes a new goal of increasing the statewide graduation rate to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year, the 2004 state plan incorporates a clause that would have allowed the past state goals and objectives contained in the plan to "be revised periodically according to identified needs."

Valuable time has been used to create new plans that could have been better spent evaluating programs to ensure there is a positive effect on the dropout and graduation rates.

Although the template for the 2007 district dropout prevention plans requires the compilation of data such as the demographics of students and teachers and the number of GED students and truants in the school district, the template distributed to the school districts by the Office of Dropout Prevention includes several areas that were included in the 2004 district plans (such as performance indicators on current dropout prevention programs, baseline data for each year, and a list of current district programs). Even though the 2004 district plans were supposed to be updated annually, the director of the Office of Dropout Prevention explains that the reason behind the new plans is to provide an update on current district initiatives and proposed dropout prevention programs.

Much of the earlier work on the plans is now being repeated without the benefit of knowing whether any of the previous efforts made a difference in the graduation and dropout rates.

The new district plans, while they are not required to conform to the specific format of the template, must contain certain components, such as including both current and proposed dropout prevention initiatives. (See Appendix M, page 101, for the required components of the district dropout prevention plans.)

The plans must also address the NDPC/N's 15 Effective Strategies, as well as the Superintendent's 5 Strategies, although the two are not interrelated. (See Appendix L, page 99, for the 15 Effective Strategies and Appendix O, page 109, for the Superintendent's Strategies.)

Districts are being asked to complete the same work that was done in 2004, creating confusion and dissatisfaction within the districts.

PEER has learned in interviews with personnel from selected school districts that as a result of the change in state plans, MDE has created confusion within the some of the districts with regard to what is required under the new initiative. In 2004, a dropout prevention committee was

formed in each district and a needs assessment was conducted to determine the areas that needed to be addressed in the district plan. Now, in 2007, much of the earlier work is being repeated without the benefit of knowing whether any of the previous efforts made a difference in the graduation and dropout rates. Districts have not been given a chance to determine whether their existing programs have met the goals laid out in the 2004 plans. Many of the districts already have programs in place, and while some may change and add programs based on their needs assessments, the 2004 plans contain similar information that will be found in the new district plans.

While some programs may have changed since the 2004 plan was created, selected districts have reported that the backbone of the 2007 plan is the same.

Training Sessions Lack Sufficient Instruction Regarding Implementation of District Dropout Prevention Plans

While the Office of Dropout Prevention is conducting training sessions in accordance with the timeline set out in the state dropout plan, the training sessions do not provide the districts with the essential steps needed to create and implement a district dropout prevention plan.

Although noted national speakers have enhanced district leaders' understanding of the dropout problem nationally, districts had anticipated that training sessions would provide step-by-step instructions for drafting district plans.

MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-3-46 (c) (1972) states that MDE will "provide to local school districts technical assistance in the development, implementation and administration of programs designed to keep children in school voluntarily and to prevent dropouts."

Several districts have hired consultants instead of relying on the technical assistance provided by the Office of Dropout Prevention.

Although the office is fulfilling the requirement that it must provide dropout prevention program training sessions to districts, selected district officials interviewed by PEER stated that these training sessions did not provide sufficient guidance on how to conduct the needs assessments and implement dropout prevention plans. As a result, several districts have hired consultants instead of relying on the technical assistance provided by the office. PEER notes that its conclusion regarding the training sessions providing insufficient guidance on the needs assessments and dropout prevention plans is based on PEER's observations during attendance at the September training session and through interviews with staff of selected school districts. This conclusion is not a generalization for all public school districts.

In comparing the records of district training sessions held in 2004 and the guidelines and training sessions held in 2007, PEER noted differences in the information and level

of assistance provided by MDE. While in 2004 MDE did not draft guidelines for the districts in the development of dropout prevention plans, training sessions did take the districts step-by-step through the process of creating a district dropout prevention plan. The training sessions, held in conjunction with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, walked the districts through a four-step process that used a "logic model for dropout prevention" to address each of the four goals of the 2004 state dropout prevention plan (refer to Exhibit 7, page 27, for the goals of the 2004 plan). These steps included completing a needs assessment, identifying performance indicators, selecting scientifically research based programs and strategies, and answering evaluation questions.

In 2007, the office has made available to the districts the following three sets of guidelines: "Guidelines for the Development of Local Dropout Prevention Teams & Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention," "Guidelines for the Development of a Local District Needs Assessment," and "Guidelines for the Development of a Local Dropout Prevention Plan." These guidelines provide a timeline for state implementation goals that have or will be completed by MDE. The guidelines also contain the required components that must be found within the plans and additional research in dropout prevention. While MDE has provided this information, these guidelines and district training sessions lack step-by-step instructions on how to develop a district dropout prevention plan.

Districts have reported that they are not receiving direction from MDE on the district plans and are frustrated because similar information is disseminated at each meeting.

Speakers from nationally recognized institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University, have attended the 2007 training sessions to provide the districts with an insight into the dropout problem as it exists throughout the country. While these speakers have valuable information on the reasons students drop out of school, in interviews representatives from different school districts reported that they anticipated that these training sessions would walk the districts through both the needs assessments and the district plans. District personnel reported that instead of the group activities planned during the sessions, they wanted information on how to conduct the needs assessments and the district dropout prevention plans. Districts have also reported that they are not receiving direction from MDE on the district plans and are frustrated because similar information is disseminated at each meeting.

According to MDE, 126 school districts were represented at the three regional training sessions. At the training sessions in September, October, and November, the office had a template on hand for the district plans and for the needs assessments, but districts are not required to follow these formats as long as the mandatory components are found within the plan. (See Appendix M, page 101, for the required components of the district plans.) Although PEER

was able to obtain a copy after requesting one from the director, some districts reported that they did not receive a district plan template from the office during the training sessions, although it is now available on the office's website.

The Office of Dropout Prevention does not have criteria in place to evaluate the new district plans that will start to become due in February 2008.

Also, the Office of Dropout Prevention does not currently have criteria in place to evaluate the new district plans that will start to become due in February 2008. Since the office does not currently have criteria for evaluating the plans after the districts submit them, the office staff will be unable to prepare a district during training sessions concerning what the office will be seeking. While the office does provide components that must be included in the plan, the criteria for evaluation and providing effective feedback to the districts in a timely manner before implementation during the 2008-2009 school year have not been developed.

PEER has observed in both training sessions and interviews with district personnel that the lack of assistance at the outset from the office is causing confusion within the districts and delays in completing both the districts' needs assessments and their draft dropout prevention plans.

Since the results of the needs assessments are not required to be submitted, but instead are a part of the plan, the office has no way of knowing whether the districts are surveying the necessary groups within the needs assessment or whether the district is adequately assessing the current dropout environment within the community. PEER observed that at least one school district has no plans of surveying the community during its needs assessment.

While the office's staff claims that they will be able to see the results of the needs assessments within the district plans, some districts have not conducted assessments on all interested parties, such as community members and dropouts themselves.

The 2007 state plan has set out a timeline for receiving draft plans from districts, and divides the 152 districts into northern, central and southern school districts. The first draft district dropout prevention plans are due in February 2008 from the northern districts. Since several districts waited until the training sessions in September, October, and November to begin the needs assessments, the districts have less time to complete all the necessary steps before the draft is due.

Although MDE has provided the districts with guidelines on conducting needs assessments and developing district dropout prevention plans, staff of selected districts interviewed by PEER expressed a need for more assistance from the Office of Dropout Prevention at the training

sessions in completing these two requirements. As noted previously, the training sessions did not walk the districts through the process of creating the needs assessments and dropout plans that many of districts had been looking for, leaving the dropout prevention teams to either require additional help from the office, hire consultants, or develop a process on their own. Since funding for dropout prevention programs and consultants is left up to the districts and due to monetary constraints, districts may not be able to implement new dropout prevention programs. According to MDE, forty-seven school districts had requested additional assistance from the office during the 2006-07 school year and through the summer of 2007.

No Evaluation of Existing Initiatives

Prior to the implementation of a new State Dropout Prevention Plan in 2007, the department did not conduct a review of existing initiatives to determine the effect of current programs on the dropout and graduation rate, or whether a new focus was needed to increase the graduation rate.

A 2002 MDE report on dropouts did not assess the effectiveness of individual dropout programs and the department's Office of Educational Accountability does not plan to assess the effectiveness of individual dropout prevention programs, despite a mandate in the current state plan to do so. According to MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-151-9 (2) (1972), assessments of programs established under the Education Reform Act of 1982 are the responsibility of the Office of Educational Accountability.

The department will only monitor dropout and graduation rates in each district as a very broad measure of their dropout prevention programs' effectiveness. The problem with this strategy is that it does not yield sufficient information for a district to make needed adjustments to its dropout prevention programs.

As noted on page 24, the office completed its report on dropouts in December 2002. However, in assessing public school dropout programs in 2002, the office did not identify the outputs, outcomes, or efficiency of individual programs. While this review and the recommendations contained therein have led to implementation of a system that tries to ensure that data is reported accurately at the district level, the report does not assess any of the dropout prevention programs in place. Instead of being a program assessment review, the report provides an overview, or "snapshot" of the state of the dropout situation in Mississippi as of December 2002.

According to the 2007 state plan, an assessment of individual programs "will be conducted to determine the level of implementation and overall impact of each program on dropout prevention." According to the director of the Office of Educational Accountability, MDE does not have the resources to review the effectiveness of individual dropout prevention programs. Instead, the department will only monitor dropout and graduation rates in each district as a very broad measure of their dropout prevention programs' effectiveness. The problem with this strategy is that it does not yield sufficient

information for a district to make needed adjustments to its dropout prevention programs. In order to achieve the ambitious statewide goals for graduation and dropout prevention, each district will need to implement best practices and measure the efficiency and effectiveness of individual dropout prevention programs in meeting their specific program objectives.

Public Awareness Campaign Delayed

The new state plan encompasses seven critical components "to be implemented at the state and local levels." Of those seven components, the public relations dropout prevention awareness campaign has not yet been completed by MDE, despite the recommendation of the department's own consultant to initiate a "kickoff campaign" in September 2006 at the beginning of the state's new dropout prevention efforts.

The new state dropout prevention plan incorporates seven Critical Components for increasing the graduation rate and reducing the dropout rate, including a Public Relations Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign and an assessment of current initiatives. (See Appendix N, page 107, for the 7 Critical Components) According to the state plan, "by April 2007, Dropout Prevention Taskforce meetings will convene based on each component, with representation from Local Dropout Prevention team members, to set timelines for implementation and methods for evaluation for each component." The Office of Dropout Prevention has yet to complete either of these two components. (See page 44 for discussion of the assessment of existing initiatives.)

Had a public awareness campaign occurred before releasing the new graduation rates, it would have helped the communities that the districts serve understand why rates have changed and why a new plan or initiative is needed.

MDE has recently secured $1.5 million from a private source for a media dropout campaign to begin in 2008. The timing of the media campaign has been dictated by the availability of funds and will include commercials and summits to change the culture of education in Mississippi in accordance with one of the superintendent's strategies to "create a culture in Mississippi that understands the value of education." At least one district has reported that the lack of a statewide campaign at the outset of the process of creating district plans has opened poorer performing districts to attack and criticism from the community based on a drop in the graduation rate due to the new calculation being employed by MDE. Another district reported that, because of its comparatively high graduation rate, the community does not feel that there is a problem.

As a result of beginning a media campaign after the new cohort data was released and districts have begun their needs assessment and drafting their district dropout prevention plans, districts are being scrutinized by their communities for a reduction in the district graduation rate that is a result of a new method of calculating the rates

based on a four-year cohort. Had a campaign occurred before releasing the new rates, it would have helped the communities that the districts serve understand why rates have changed and why a new plan or initiative is needed. It also could have brought awareness to the communities that the graduation rate is a statewide issue.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Education should evaluate the current dropout prevention programs to ensure that the programs are implemented correctly and to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of each program in meeting its specific program objectives.

   a. The Office of Dropout Prevention should evaluate the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices.

   b. The Office of Dropout Prevention should provide the districts with cost and cost-effectiveness data on the fifty exemplary programs identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

   c. The Office of Dropout Prevention should focus on the school districts with the highest dropout rates and the lowest graduation rates in the state and provide assistance in implementing new dropout prevention programs that conform to best practices and in evaluating current measures in place.

   d. The Office of Dropout Prevention should immediately draft criteria for evaluating the district dropout prevention plans to aid the districts in understanding what is expected in the plans that are due beginning in February 2008.

2. The Legislature should amend MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-13-80 (1972) to require the Office of Dropout Prevention to report annually to the Legislature the following:

   a. a list of the districts whose graduation, dropout, and completion rates have increased or decreased the most (beginning on January 1, 2009);

   b. which districts are achieving their goals and which are not reaching the objectives set forth by the districts

in the district plans (beginning on January 1, 2010); and,

c.   what is being done in the school districts with the highest dropout rates and the lowest graduation rates to increase the graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate (beginning on January 1, 2009).

Appendix A: Unofficial Estimates of Mississippi Public School Four-Year Dropout, Completion, and Graduation Rates, by School District, for the Full Cohort of Students Who Began the Ninth Grade During the 2001-2002 School Year*

CODE	DISTRICT NAME	TOTAL COHORT N-COUNT	4-YEAR DROPOUT RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR COMPLETION RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE ESTIMATE
0	Mississippi	51391	26.6	67	60.8
4820	Aberdeen	215	32.5	59.6	51.6
200	Alcorn	357	18.6	79.4	69.7
300	Amite County	188	43	46.4	43
4821	Amory	195	28.4	67.5	60.8
400	Attala County	109	17	78.2	77
5920	Baldwyn	112	25.6	72.8	60.5
2320	Bay St. Louis	292	24.3	67.1	62.6
612	Benoit	25	17.4	55	50
500	Benton County	131	22.2	72.8	69.3
2420	Biloxi	671	17.8	77.5	66.4
5921	Booneville	104	6.5	92.3	92.3
4320	Brookhaven	338	16.6	75.5	70.5
700	Calhoun County	263	17.8	76.5	68.1
4520	Canton	497	61.7	29.1	27.3
800	Carroll County	140	31.1	65.8	59.8
900	Chickasaw County	53	11.1	79.1	62.8
1000	Choctaw County	159	31.4	66.9	64.7
1100	Claiborne County	190	8	88.2	85.3
1420	Clarksdale	267	20.1	75	68
614	Cleveland	376	24.3	69.1	67
2521	Clinton	451	23.9	74.2	73.2
1402	Coahoma AHS	144	45.6	44.9	39
1400	Coahoma County	142	37.1	52.5	51.5
8111	Coffeeville	94	31.3	62.7	45.8
4620	Columbia	208	4.3	91.4	82.8
4420	Columbus	524	26.3	66.2	63.6
1500	Copiah County	349	28.8	67.3	59.9
220	Corinth	179	23.5	76.5	67.8
1600	Covington County	375	12.8	81.4	66.8
1700	DeSoto County	2550	12.5	82.5	78.9
6720	Drew	88	24.7	68.9	64.9
2620	Durant	75	18.8	68.8	62.5
3111	East Jasper	94	4.5	87.5	78.4
6811	East Tallahatch	149	31.7	65.6	60
1211	Enterprise	77	3.6	96.2	92.5
6220	Forest City	132	40.5	56.5	45.2
1802	Forrest AHS	245	30.3	58	53.1
1800	Forrest County	79	27.7	70.8	64.6
1900	Franklin County	170	12.1	84.2	61.2
2000	George County	398	32.1	62.4	56.9
2100	Greene County	194	26.3	73.1	64.9
7620	Greenville	709	25.2	65	58.5
4220	Greenwood	306	35.2	55.6	54.5
2220	Grenada	440	35.7	55.8	47.5
2421	Gulfport	703	22.2	71.2	63.2
2300	Hancock County	466	24.9	66.2	57.6
2400	Harrison County	1441	28.4	63.9	54.5
1820	Hattiesburg	481	30	59.1	53.8
1520	Hazlehurst City	144	34.1	58.2	53.7
2502	Hinds AHS	166	43.9	48	45.9
2500	Hinds County	582	20.5	74.6	68.8
7611	Hollandale	87	41.9	56.8	54.1
4720	Holly Springs	203	29.9	54.9	52.2

*The Clay County School District enrolls only K-6 students.

CODE	DISTRICT NAME	TOTAL COHORT N-COUNT	4-YEAR DROPOUT RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR COMPLETION RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE ESTIMATE
2600	Holmes County	368	22	55.8	48.8
920	Houston Separate	212	40.6	56.6	48.6
2700	Humphreys County	200	27	65.3	58.4
6721	Indianola	367	33.3	56.2	49.2
2900	Itawamba County	338	34.8	60.7	58.4
3000	Jackson County	972	32	62.2	59.2
2520	Jackson Public	3487	32.4	55.6	50.5
3300	Jeff.Davis County	246	29	65.7	61.1
3200	Jefferson County	132	18.5	73.4	69.4
3400	Jones County	770	25.1	71.5	69.1
3500	Kemper County	93	26.4	58.9	54.4
420	Kosciusko	210	8.1	87.8	73
3600	Lafayette County	244	16	78.7	62.8
3700	Lamar County	737	19.4	77.3	75.5
3800	Lauderdale County	759	26.1	68.5	61.6
3420	Laurel	323	25.6	70.2	52.2
3900	Lawrence County	192	21.2	73.6	71.2
4000	Leake County	309	34.3	58.2	56
4100	Lee County	650	26.5	66.4	57
4200	Leflore County	323	36.6	55.4	47
7612	Leland	130	22.5	72.7	67
4300	Lincoln County	249	23.6	74	72.6
2422	Long Beach	417	23.2	70.8	66.5
8020	Louisville	338	44.9	47.3	44.3
4400	Lowndes County	595	24	71.7	65.1
3711	Lumberton	100	28.2	67.6	62
4500	Madison	934	15	82.5	78.7
4600	Marion County	294	19	67.8	61.7
4700	Marshall County	393	34.2	57.3	53.6
5720	McComb	326	30.3	65.8	58.1
3820	Meridian	702	36.4	54.3	48.9
4800	Monroe County	247	21.9	76.1	68.5
4900	Montgomery County	55	48	44.4	37.8
3020	Moss Point	442	38	52.5	47
616	Mound Bayou	87	21.7	73.9	66.7
130	Natchez-Adams	576	32.4	59.6	54.9
5000	Neshoba County	264	29.4	65.1	58.3
4111	Nettleton	120	20.6	76.6	57.9
7320	New Albany	174	15.9	80.9	73.3
5130	Newton City	98	39.8	50	47.6
5100	Newton County	178	23.4	73	67.4
613	North Bolivar	112	33	62.2	42.9
5411	North Panola	199	38.8	55.4	49.5
5711	North Pike	178	29.7	67.7	64.6
7011	North Tippah	128	14.6	82.4	73.5
5200	Noxubee County	239	34.4	60.8	55.5
3021	Ocean Springs	595	13.3	81.5	79.3
921	Okolona Separate	98	45.1	47.8	45.6
5300	Oktibbeha County	120	32.7	57.7	43.3
3620	Oxford	293	18.8	78.6	76.2
3022	Pascagoula	785	29.6	65.1	58.4
2423	Pass Christian	226	5.7	79.3	69.3
6120	Pearl	357	30.6	66.6	62.1
5500	Pearl River	298	26.9	70.5	51

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CODE	DISTRICT NAME	TOTAL COHORT N-COUNT	4-YEAR DROPOUT RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR COMPLETION RATE ESTIMATE	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE ESTIMATE
5600	Perry County	125	7.6	89	76.9
1821	Petal	327	26.5	69.2	67.3
5020	Philadelphia	95	25.6	74.1	69.4
5520	Picayune	447	30.6	64.7	53.6
5820	Pontotoc City	179	15.1	82.1	69.5
5800	Pontotoc County	322	5.9	92.3	75.2
5530	Poplarville	192	20.5	74.8	66.9
5900	Prentiss County	227	11.4	87.2	86.6
1212	Quitman	264	25.7	67.4	60.1
6000	Quitman County	128	26.1	67.8	51.3
6100	Rankin County	1586	17.3	79.7	78.3
5620	Richton	97	32.9	62.2	59.8
6200	Scott County	387	29.7	67.1	59.2
6920	Senatobia	190	12.7	84.5	81.7
615	Shaw	76	16.2	79.4	67.6
6400	Simpson County	361	21.9	72.7	66
6500	Smith County	340	22.5	72.3	63.3
6312	South Delta	130	39.8	48	44.7
5412	South Panola	442	18.8	76.1	66.2
5712	South Pike	225	39.1	53.5	49
7012	South Tippah	258	21.6	76.4	72.6
5320	Starkville	450	36.1	59.4	58.2
6600	Stone County	293	14.8	82.1	77.7
6700	Sunflower County	104	34.5	61.9	52.4
6900	Tate County	332	26.6	64.5	56.2
7100	Tishomingo County	312	13.8	86.1	73
7200	Tunica County	201	31.7	60.6	56.7
4120	Tupelo	697	27.9	67	56.7
5131	Union City	77	23.4	71.9	64.1
7300	Union County	227	8.7	91.3	80.2
7500	Vicksburg-Warre	920	37.9	52.7	49.5
7400	Walthall County	275	15.3	75.8	67.7
8113	Water Valley	139	32	62.8	47.9
7700	Wayne County	489	29.9	64.4	54.1
7800	Webster County	191	20.5	78.3	66.3
611	West Bolivar	130	30.8	60.2	55.8
3112	West Jasper	159	31	64.1	50.7
1320	West Point	428	41.8	50.7	47.2
6812	West Tallahatch	122	22.3	66	60.2
7613	Western Line	271	32.1	60.4	58.9
7900	Wilkinson County	169	31.4	56.7	48.4
4920	Winona	154	19.3	71.3	71.3
8220	Yazoo City	242	38.2	55.6	50.7
8200	Yazoo County	205	29.3	66.3	61.5

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education, *Unofficial Estimates of 4-Year Dropout, Completion, and Graduation Rates for the Full Cohort of Students Beginning with Ninth Graders in 2001/2002.*

Appendix B: Maps Showing Mississippi Public School District Dropout, Completion, and Graduation Rates for the Full Cohort of Students Who Began the Ninth Grade During the 2001-2002 School Year, by Rate Categories

SOURCE: Maps generated by PEER using data from the Mississippi Department of Education, *Unofficial Estimates of 4-Year Dropout, Completion, and Graduation Rates for the Full Cohort of Students Beginning with Ninth Graders in 2001/2002.*

Mississippi Public School Districts with Identification Number
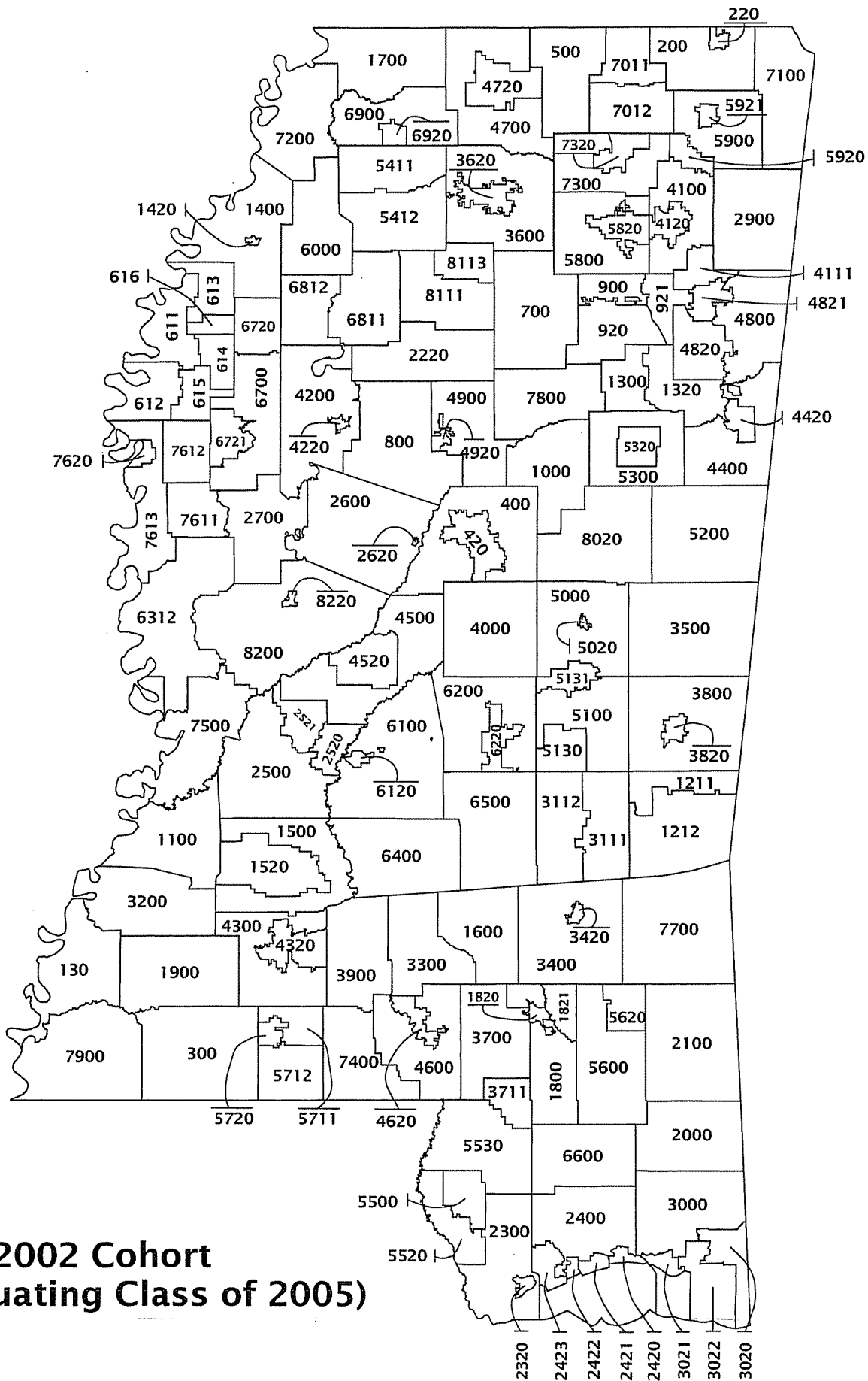
**2001-2002 Cohort
(Graduating Class of 2005)**

DISTRICT ID CODE	DISTRICT NAME
4820	Aberdeen
200	Alcorn
300	Amite County
4821	Amory
400	Attala County
5920	Baldwyn
2320	Bay St. Louis
612	Benoit
500	Benton County
2420	Biloxi
5921	Booneville
4320	Brookhaven
700	Calhoun County
4520	Canton
800	Carroll County
900	Chickasaw County
1000	Choctaw County
1100	Claiborne County
1420	Clarksdale
1300	Clay
614	Cleveland
2521	Clinton
1402	Coahoma AHS
1400	Coahoma County
8111	Coffeeville
4620	Columbia
4420	Columbus
1500	Copiah County
220	Corinth
1600	Covington County
1700	DeSoto County
6720	Drew
2620	Durant
3111	East Jasper
6811	East Tallahatch
1211	Enterprise
6220	Forest City
1802	Forrest AHS
1800	Forrest County
1900	Franklin County
2000	George County
2100	Greene County
7620	Greenville
4220	Greenwood
2220	Grenada
2421	Gulfport
2300	Hancock County
2400	Harrison County
1820	Hattiesburg
1520	Hazlehurst City
2502	Hinds AHS

DISTRICT ID CODE	DISTRICT NAME
2500	Hinds County
7611	Hollandale
4720	Holly Springs
2600	Holmes County
920	Houston Separate
2700	Humphreys County
6721	Indianola
2900	Itawamba County
3000	Jackson County
2520	Jackson Public
3300	Jeff.Davis County
3200	Jefferson County
3400	Jones County
3500	Kemper County
420	Kosciusko
3600	Lafayette County
3700	Lamar County
3800	Lauderdale County
3420	Laurel
3900	Lawrence County
4000	Leake County
4100	Lee County
4200	Leflore County
7612	Leland
4300	Lincoln County
2422	Long Beach
8020	Louisville
4400	Lowndes County
3711	Lumberton
4500	Madison
4600	Marion County
4700	Marshall County
5720	McComb
3820	Meridian
4800	Monroe County
4900	Montgomery County
3020	Moss Point
616	Mound Bayou
130	Natchez-Adams
5000	Neshoba County
4111	Nettleton
7320	New Albany
5130	Newton City
5100	Newton County
613	North Bolivar
5411	North Panola
5711	North Pike
7011	North Tippah
5200	Noxubee County
3021	Ocean Springs
921	Okolona Separate

DISTRICT ID CODE	DISTRICT NAME
5300	Oktibbeha County
3620	Oxford
3022	Pascagoula
2423	Pass Christian
6120	Pearl
5500	Pearl River
5600	Perry County
1821	Petal
5020	Philadelphia
5520	Picayune
5820	Pontotoc City
5800	Pontotoc County
5530	Poplarville
5900	Prentiss County
1212	Quitman
6000	Quitman County
6100	Rankin County
5620	Richton
6200	Scott County
6920	Senatobia
615	Shaw
6400	Simpson County
6500	Smith County
6312	South Delta
5412	South Panola
5712	South Pike
7012	South Tippah
5320	Starkville
6600	Stone County
6700	Sunflower County
6900	Tate County
7100	Tishomingo County
7200	Tunica County
4120	Tupelo
5131	Union City
7300	Union County
7500	Vicksburg-Warre
7400	Walthall County
8113	Water Valley
7700	Wayne County
7800	Webster County
611	West Bolivar
3112	West Jasper
1320	West Point
6812	West Tallahatch
7613	Western Line
7900	Wilkinson County
4920	Winona
8220	Yazoo City
8200	Yazoo County

Mississippi Public School Districts - Graduation Rate
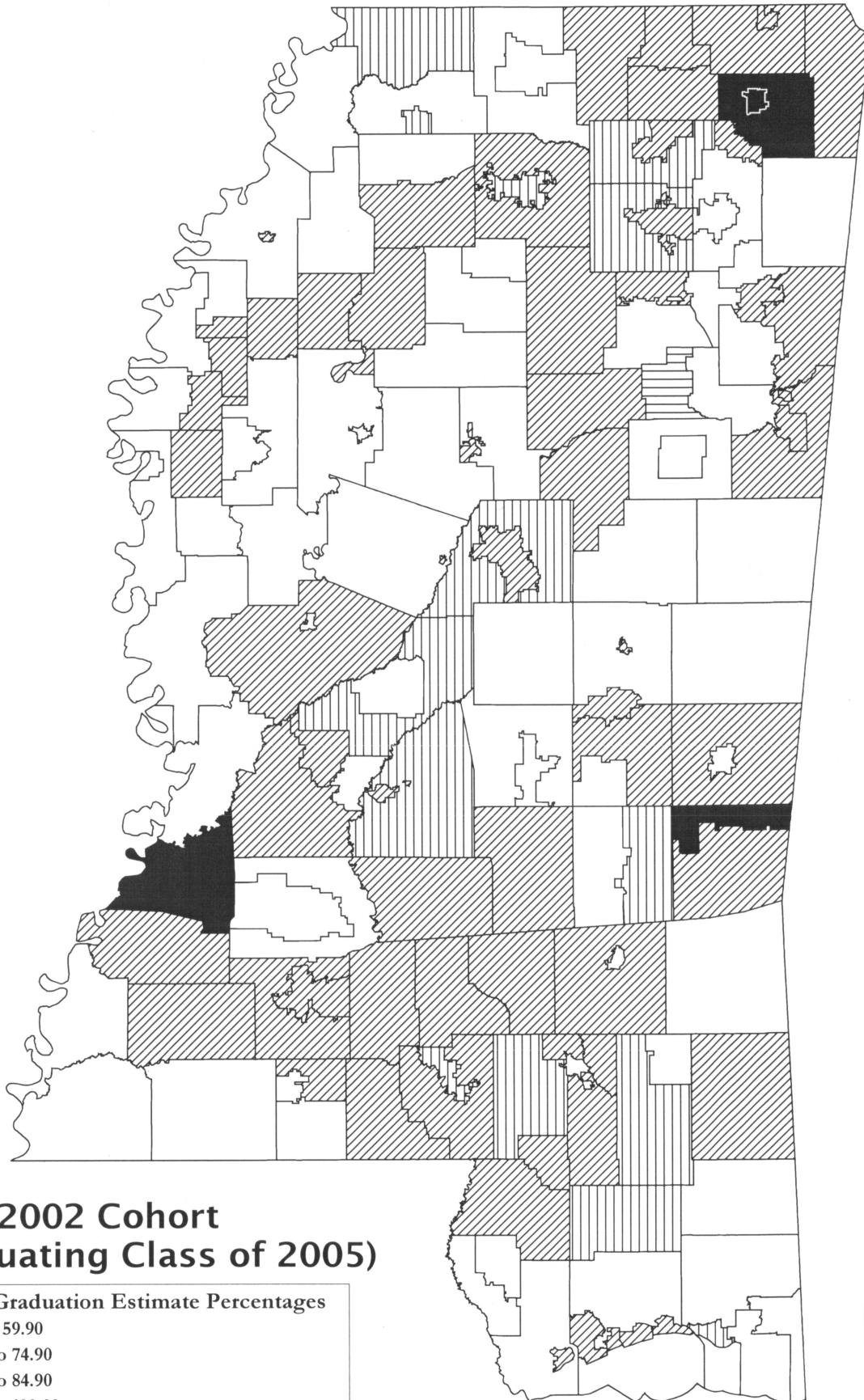
2001-2002 Cohort
(Graduating Class of 2005)
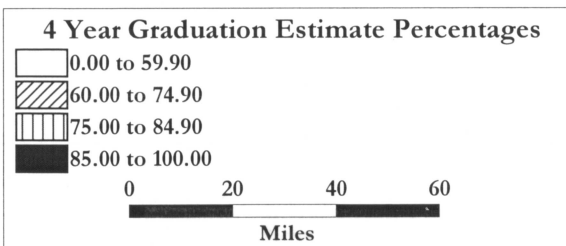
4 Year Graduation Estimate Percentages

	0.00 to 59.90
	60.00 to 74.90
	75.00 to 84.90
	85.00 to 100.00

0   20   40   60

Miles

Clay County Public School District (ID: 1300) only enrolls K-6. No data available for higher grade performance.

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Mississippi Public School Districts - Completion Rate
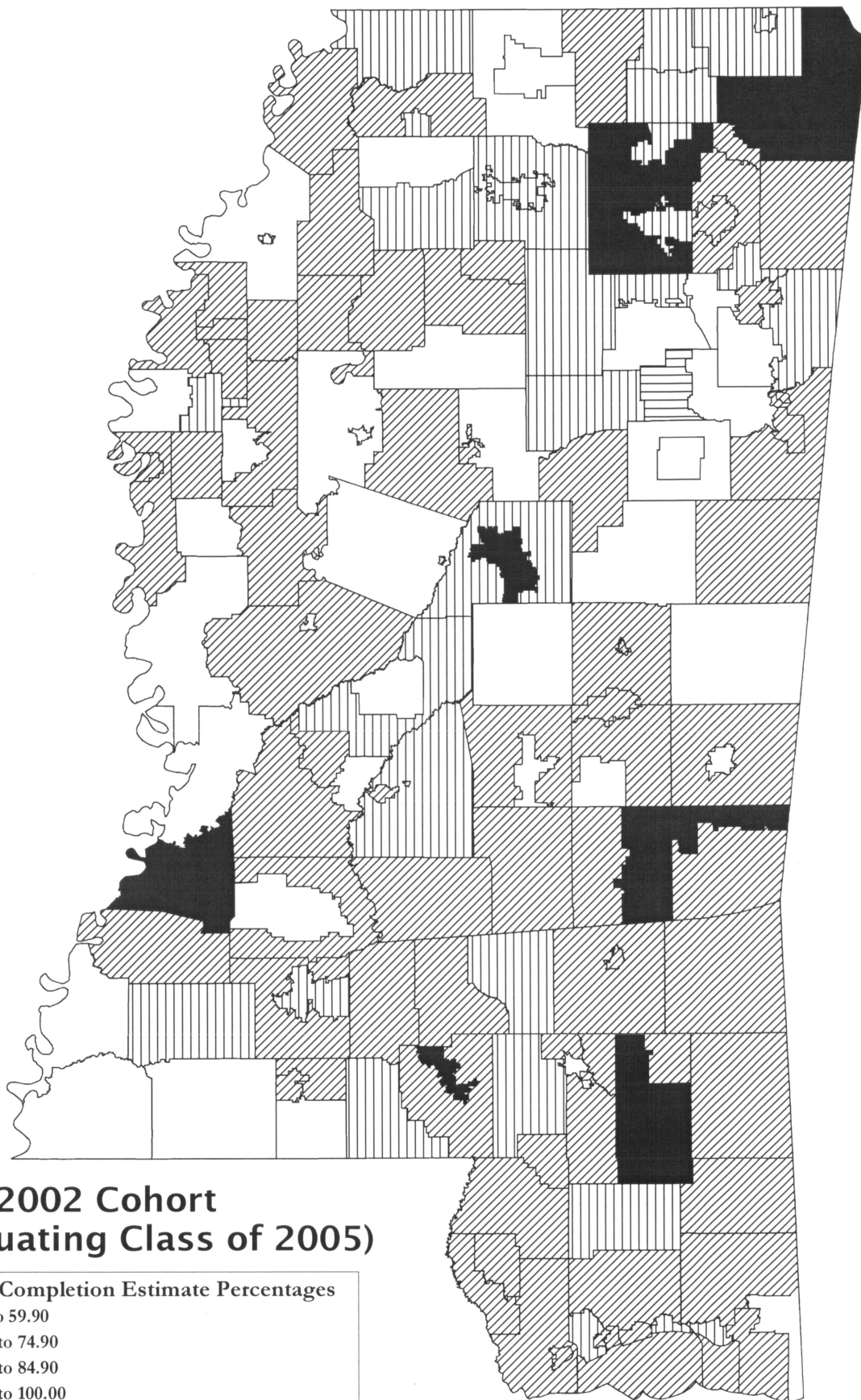
2001-2002 Cohort
(Graduating Class of 2005)
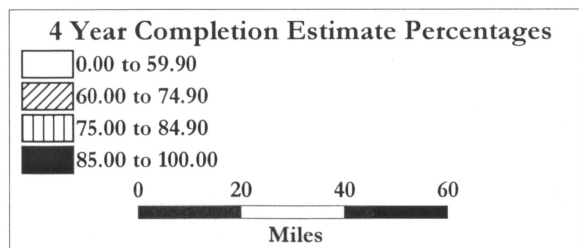
4 Year Completion Estimate Percentages

- 0.00 to 59.90
- 60.00 to 74.90
- 75.00 to 84.90
- 85.00 to 100.00

0   20   40   60

Miles

Clay County Public
School District
(ID: 1300) only
enrolls K-6. No
data available for
higher grade
performance.

Mississippi Public School Districts - Dropout Rate
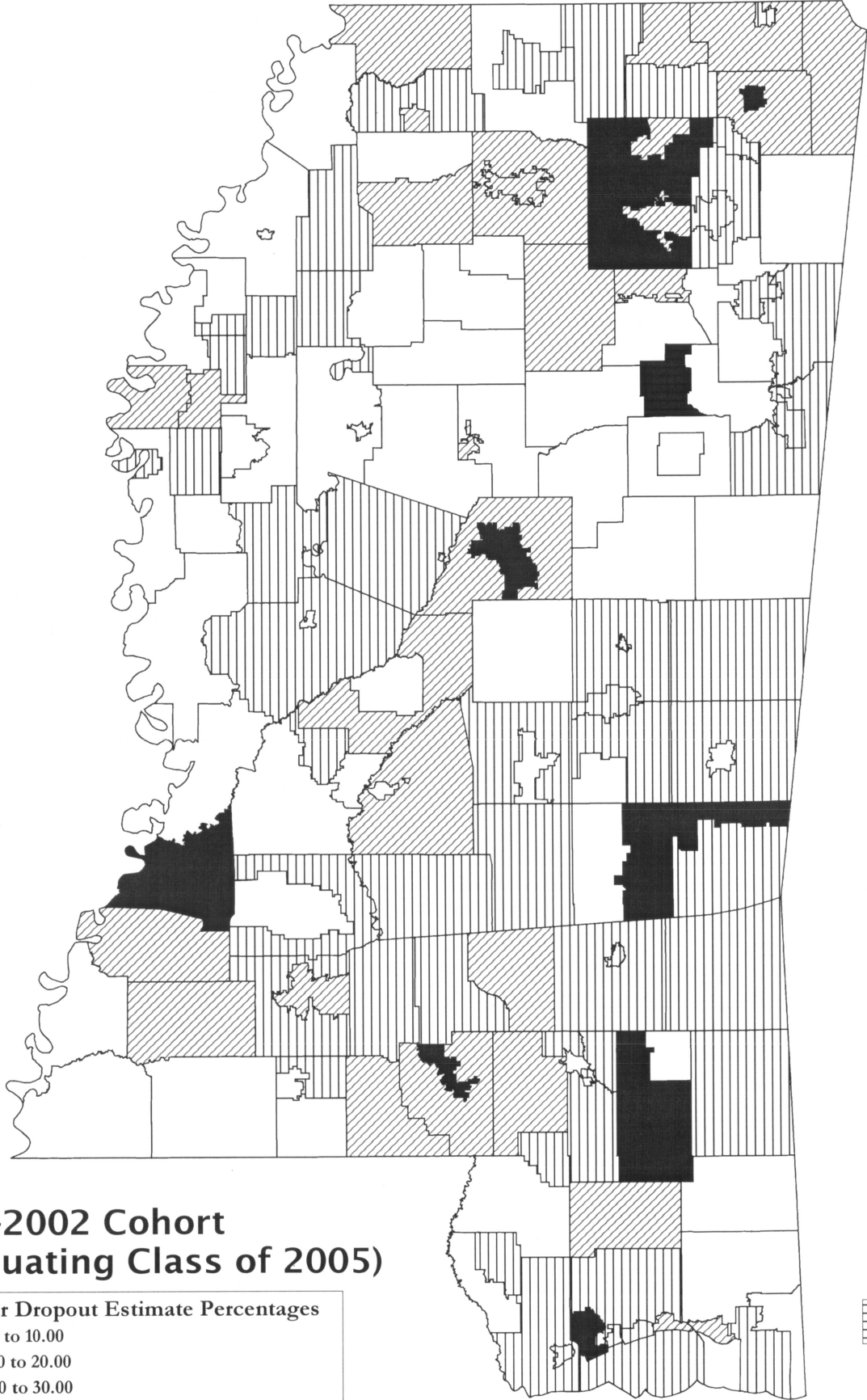
2001-2002 Cohort
(Graduating Class of 2005)
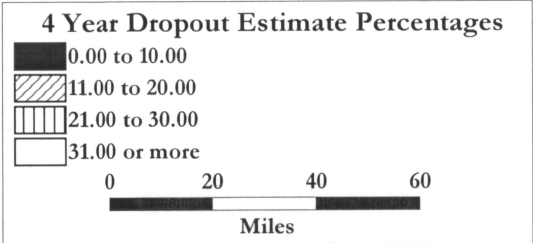
4 Year Dropout Estimate Percentages

- 0.00 to 10.00
- 11.00 to 20.00
- 21.00 to 30.00
- 31.00 or more

0   20   40   60

Miles

Clay County Public School District (ID: 1300) only enrolls K-6. No data available for higher grade performance.

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Appendix C: Reasons that Mississippi Students Dropped Out of Public School during the 2005-2006 School Year

Reasons	Totals	Percentage
Entered a GED or an institutional program not primarily educational	1564	27.79%
Over Compulsory Attendance Age	1283	22.80%
Reasons Unknown	644	11.44%
Suspended/Expelled	602	10.70%
Whereabouts unknown	524	9.31%
Dislike of School Experience	287	5.10%
Other	226	4.02%
Pregnant	89	1.58%
Lack of parental support/interest	80	1.42%
Restrained by court action	65	1.15%
Would/could not keep up with work- was failing	56	1.00%
Physical Illness or physical disability	54	0.96%
Economic Reasons	45	0.80%
Behavioral Difficulty exclusive of suspension/expulsion	43	0.76%
Must care for family member	31	0.55%
Felt like I did not belong	11	0.20%
Married	11	0.20%
Drug and/or alcohol problem	8	0.14%
Emotional Disturbance	4	0.07%
Peer Pressure	1	0.02%
State Totals:	**5628**	**100.00%**

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education, "Reasons for Dropouts Yearly Report 2005-2006," *2005-2006 Dropouts.*

Appendix D: State Rankings Based on the 2006 Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate

State	Graduation Rate (2006)
1. Minnesota	90.1
2. Vermont	89.3
3. Iowa	86.4
4. Wisconsin	86.3
5. New Jersey	85.7
6. Maine	81.6
7. Arizona	80.3
7. Nebraska	80.3
9. New Hampshire	80.2
10. North Dakota	80.0
11. Montana	79.7
12. South Dakota	79.4
13. Utah	78.8
14. Pennsylvania	78.7
15. Arkansas	78.3
16. Idaho	78.2
16. Missouri	78.2
18. Connecticut	78.0
19. Kansas	77.7
20. Virginia	75.0
21. Oklahoma	74.2
22. Illinois	73.9
22. Wyoming	73.9
24. Massachusetts	73.6
25. Ohio	73.4
25. Oregon	73.4
27. Maryland	73.3
28. Colorado	73.1
29. West Virginia	72.9
30. Kentucky	71.5
31. California	70.0
32. Delaware	68.6
33. Tennessee	68.3
34. Michigan	67.8
35. Indiana	67.3
36. Washington	66.6
37. Hawaii	66.0
38. North Carolina	65.5
39. Rhode Island	65.1
40. Alaska	65.0
41. Mississippi	64.6
42. Texas	63.9
43. New York	63.1
44. Louisiana	62.2
45. Georgia	62.1
46. New Mexico	60.0
47. Alabama	58.7

48. Nevada	58.4
49. South Carolina	55.8
50. Florida	52.3

SOURCE: Morgan Quitno Press using data from National Education Association, Washington, D.C. "Rankings & Estimates" and U.S. Department of Education, as quoted in *State Rankings 2007*.

Appendix E: State Rankings Based on the 2002 Annual Event Dropout Rates

State	Dropout Rate (2002)
1. Arizona	10.5
2. Alaska	8.1
3. New York	7.1
3. Washington	7.1
5. Louisiana	7.0
6. Georgia	6.5
7. Illinois	6.4
7. Nevada	6.4
9. Delaware	6.2
10. Wyoming	5.8
11. North Carolina	5.7
12. Arkansas	5.3
13. New Mexico	5.2
14. Hawaii	5.1
15. Oregon	4.9
16. Oklahoma	4.4
17. Rhode Island	4.3
18. Nebraska	4.2
19. Kentucky	4.0
19. New Hampshire	4.0
19. Vermont	4.0
22. Idaho	3.9
22. Maryland	3.9
22. Mississippi	3.9
22. Montana	3.9
26. Minnesota	3.8
26. Tennessee	3.8
26. Texas	3.8
29. Alabama	3.7
29. Florida	3.7
29. Utah	3.7
29. West Virginia	3.7
33. Missouri	3.6
34. Pennsylvania	3.3
34. South Carolina	3.3
36. Kansas	3.1
36. Ohio	3.1
38. Virginia	2.9
39. Maine	2.8
39. South Dakota	2.8
41. Connecticut	2.6
42. New Jersey	2.5
43. Iowa	2.4
44. Indiana	2.3
45. North Dakota	2.0
46. Wisconsin	1.9
NA California	NA

NA Colorado	NA
NA Massachusetts	NA
NA Michigan	NA

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics "Dropout Rates in the United States: 2002 and 2003," as quoted in *State Rankings 2007*.

Appendix F: State Rankings Based on the Percentage of the State's Population 25 and Over who have Completed High School

State	Population Over 25 who have Completed High School (2005)
1. Wyoming	91.3
2. Alaska	91.0
3. Minnesota	90.9
4. Montana	90.7
5. Utah	90.1
6. New Hampshire	89.9
7. Iowa	89.6
8. Nebraska	89.5
8. Vermont	89.5
10. Maine	89.0
11. Washington	88.8
11. Wisconsin	88.8
13. Colorado	88.7
13. Kansas	88.7
15. South Dakota	88.6
16. North Dakota	88.2
17. Hawaii	88.1
18. Massachusetts	88.0
19. Connecticut	87.9
20. Oregon	87.5
21. Maryland	87.0
21. Michigan	87.0
23. Idaho	86.7
23. Pennsylvania	86.7
25. New Jersey	86.3
25. Ohio	86.3
27. Illinois	85.7
28. Delaware	85.6
29. Virginia	85.4
30. Indiana	85.3
31. Missouri	85.0
32. Florida	84.6
33. New York	84.3
33. Oklahoma	84.3
35. Arizona	83.8
36. Rhode Island	83.5
37. Georgia	82.8
37. Nevada	82.8
39. North Carolina	82.3
40. New Mexico	82.0
41. South Carolina	81.7
42. Tennessee	81.2
42. West Virginia	81.2
44. Arkansas	81.0
45. Louisiana	80.5

46. Alabama	80.3
47. California	80.1
48. Kentucky	79.0
49. Texas	78.8
50. Mississippi	78.5

SOURCE: U. S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey "Percent of People 25 and Over Who Have Completed High School," as quoted in *State Rankings 2007.*

Appendix G: Brief Description of Federal Programs used by MDE in its Dropout Prevention Efforts

Title	Part	Federal Program Initiative
I	A	Federal Programs under **Title 1, Part A** are designed to support state and local school reform efforts tied to challenging state academic standards in order to reinforce and amplify efforts to improve teaching and learning for students farthest from meeting state standards.
I	B.1	Through **Reading First Grants**, states and districts will receive support to apply scientifically based reading research—and proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research—to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade.
I	B.3	**Even Start Family Literacy Programs** are school-community partnerships that help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.
I	C	The **Migrant Education Program** ensures the migrant children who move among the states are not penalized in any manner by disparities among states in terms of curriculum, graduation requirements, and state academic content and academic achievement standards.
I	D.1	The **Neglected and Delinquent Program** provides formula grants for supplementary education services to help provide education continuity for children and youths in state-run institutions for juveniles and in adult correctional institutions so that these youths can make successful transitions to school or employment once they are released.
I	F	The **Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program** is designed to increase student achievement by assisting public schools across the country with implementing comprehensive reforms that are grounded in scientifically based research and effective practices. CSR programs target high-poverty and low-achieving schools, especially those receiving Title I funds, by helping them to increase the quality and accelerate the pace of their reform efforts.
II	B	The **Mathematics and Science Partnership Grants** are intended to increase the academic achievement of students in mathematics and science by enhancing the content knowledge and teaching skills of classroom teachers.
II	D	The primary goal of the **Enhancing Education Through Technology Act of 2001** was to improve student academic achievement through the use of technology in elementary schools and secondary schools.
III		The **English Language Learners (ELL) Program** ensures that ELL students, including immigrant children and youth, develop English proficiency and meet the same academic content and achievement standards required of all children.
IV	A	The **Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program** provides resources to schools for decreasing the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
IV	B	**21st Century Community Learning Centers** creates community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities for children and their families by providing a safe environment for students when school is not in session and to

		provide a range of high-quality services to support student learning and development.
IV	B.2	The **Rural and Low Income Schools Program** addresses the unique needs of rural school districts that frequently lack the personnel and resources needed to compete effectively for federal competitive grants and receive formula grant allocations in amounts too small to be effective in meeting their intended purposes.
V		**Innovative Programs** support local education reform efforts that are consistent with and support statewide education reform efforts; provide funding to enable state educational agencies and local educational agencies to implement promising educational reform programs and school improvement, including support programs to provide library services and instructional and media materials; meet the educational needs of all students, including at-risk youth; and develop and implement educational programs to improve school, student and teacher performance.
VI		The **Foreign Language Grant** is flow-through federal funds from the MDE to two school districts to enhance foreign language instruction.
X	C	The **Homeless Children and Youth Program** provides activities for and services to homeless children and youth, including preschool-age children, which enable these children to enroll, attend, and succeed in school, including before or after school tutoring, supplemental instruction, and enriched educational activities.
		Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The MS Department of Human services sets forth monthly attendance requirements for any person eligible for TANF benefits.
		The **School Safety Environment Assessment Tool** serves as a resource to schools when developing their crisis response plans.
		Data Improvement Project and Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The goal of this program is to create a method of sharing data to determine the effectiveness of existing programs and to identify the need for additional programs.
		The **HIV/AIDS Program** is funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and is designed to support disease prevention and unintended pregnancy through abstinence education.
		The **Early Prevention, Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program** provides health services that include preventive screenings to Medicaid-eligible children.

SOURCE: PEER analysis of information obtained from the "Mississippi Department of Education's State Dropout Prevention Plan 2007-2019" and the U. S. Department of Education's website www.ed.gov.

Appendix H: 2004 Dropout Plan Performance Indicators and Proposed Program Activities for the Mississippi Public School District of Claiborne County

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DROPOUT PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROPOSED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

System Name: Claiborne

Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement   **Code No. 1100**

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 1. To increase the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by __2__ % (from __96.80__ % to __98.80__ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from __1__ % in 2003 to __2__ % in 2008	Increase to __%__ in 2008	—	School Attendance Enforcement	Conduct counseling sessions on a regular basis for students with chronic attendance issues to encourage good attendance			x	
					Family Involvement	Individual parent conferences with School Attendance Officer, school officials and parent coordinators will be held to inform parents about the school compulsory attendance law to improve compliance with their children attending school on a regular basis.		x		

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education.

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Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

System Name: Claiborne　　　　**Code No. 1100**

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 1. To increase the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by __2__ % (from __96.80__ % to __98.80__ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from __1__ % in 2003 to __2__ % in 2008	Increase to __ % in 2008	—	GED Option Program	Overage students and dropouts will be enrolled in the evening GED program as a means to obtain a high school diploma.			x	
					Law Enforcement	Law enforcement and businesses will contact school officials when students are on the streets during school hours as a mechanism for increasing attendance of these students and reducing absenteeism and tardiness.				x

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DROPOUT PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROPOSED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

System Name: Claiborne **Code No. 1100**

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 1. To increase the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by ___2___ % (from ___96.80___ % to ___98.80___ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from ___1___ % in 2003 to _2_ % in 2008	Increase to ___ % in 2008	——	Mentoring and Tutoring	Staff tutors and volunteers will be used to increase the success rate, daily participation and skill competencies of students with academic challenges to improve proficiency performance and skill attainment in the major content areas.	x	x		
					Monitoring	Academic Mentors will monitor attendance as it relates to achievement and encourage daily participation to maximize learning.			x	

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Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

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Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by __2__ % (from __96.80__ % to __98.80__ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from __1__ % in 2003 to __2__ % in 2008	Increase to __% in 2008	—	ISS(In-School Suspension)	Students with minor misconduct issues will be assigned to an alternate setting within the school so that learning will not be interrupted and students given the social and emotional support needed to modify behavior.			X	
					Alternative Education	An alternate setting and academic program will be placement arrangements for students with chronic conduct issues to keep them in school while addressing counseling needs as well as academic.			X	

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Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by __2__ % (from __96.80__ % to __98.80__ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from __1__ % in 2003 to __2__ % in 2008	Increase to __ % in 2008	—	Community Collaboration	Conduct community/town meetings to inform parents and citizens of the importance of students attending school daily and their role in this partnership.		x		
					Asthma Clinic	Students with respiratory problems will participate in wellness activities by healthcare officials to improve asthma condition. Regular well-child assessments will be conducted to monitor healthy status of students to keep them in school.				x

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Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

System Name: **Claiborne**   **Code No. 1100**

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 1. To increase the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The district ADA will increase by __2__ % (from __96.80__ % to __98.80__ %) by May 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The rate of ADA will increase from __1__ % in 2003 to __2__ % in 2008	Increase to __ % in 2008	—	Perfect Attendance Incentive Program	Perfect attendance banners will be placed at classroom doors as well as announced over the Public Broadcast System to promote daily attendance. Classes and individuals will be given incentives throughout the school year to encourage good attendance. Clubs will be in place to promote and encourage improved attendance from students with chronic attendance issues. Media attention, assemblies, certificates will be used to recognize perfect attendance.				x

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System Name:

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience opportunity to learn.

Code No.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
Incidents of truancy will decrease by (from _577_ to _125_) by May 2008. (Truancy-absent 5 or 10 days unexcused)	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The number of incidents of truancy will decrease from _577_ in 2003 to _125_ in 2008.	Decrease to ___ in _2008_		School Attendance Enforcement	Establish close linkages with local police, probation officers, and juvenile and family court officials to monitor attendance of students. Create monitoring efforts with police to conduct police sweeps of neighborhoods and business areas truant youth are often found Conduct investigation for unexcused absences and contact parents and counsel regarding attendance. Use Youth Court as a means of enforcing the compulsory attendance law.			x	

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DROPOUT PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROPOSED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

System Name:

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience opportunity to learn.

Code No.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
Incidents of truancy will decrease by (from 577 to 125) by May 2008. (Truancy-absent 5 or 10 days unexcused)	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The number of incidents of truancy will decrease from 577 in 2003 to 125 in 2008.	Decrease to ___ in 2008		Home/School Connection	Conduct home visits and coordinate home with school activities by Home-to-School Parent Coordinators, school officials, Attendance Officer by counseling parents on student drug use, violence at or near school, association with truant friends, emotional or mental health problems, inability to keep pace with academic requirements.				x
					Alternative Schooling	Counsel students on Job Core and Youth Challenge as alternatives to the traditional school setting in order to improve attendance, reduce number of referrals, and increase number of completers.		x		

Check One Per Activity

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System Name: **Code No.**

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
Incidents of truancy will decrease by (from 577 to 125) by May 2008. (Truancy-absent 5 or 10 days unexcused)	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The number of incidents of truancy will decrease from 577 in 2003 to 125 in 2008.	Decrease to ___ in 2008		Family Involvement	Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities to get their children to go to school on a regular basis such as monitoring, counseling families and children about their attendance, encouraging teachers and parents to make regular contact with each other before problems arise, parents participate in parent meetings and weekly phone calls with parent coordinators in an effort to reduce unexcused absences of students. Meaningful incentives will be given to parents for parental responsibility in this process. Call parents every night if their child does not attend school that day to get parents involved and make referral to appropriate resource to intervene.		X		

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System Name: _____ **Code No.** _____

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs: _____

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
							Check One Per Activity			
Incidents of truancy will decrease by (from 577 to 125) by May 2008. (Truancy-absent 5 or 10 days unexcused)	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The number of incidents of truancy will decrease from 577 in 2003 to 125 in 2008.	Decrease to ___ in 2008	___	Mentoring and Monitoring	School Attendance Officer, school counselors, parent coordinators, and instructional staff mentor and counsel students one-on-one to encourage school attendance. Identify a truancy worker to meet with the youth and family to provide short-term family counseling (approximate eight sessions). Once a truancy problem is corrected, close case and place on an aftercare/monitoring status with contact made on predetermined intervals to ensure that truancy does not persist.		x		

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System Name: _____ **Code No.** _____

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 2. To reduce the truancy rate for each school so that students experience opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs: _____

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
Incidents of truancy will decrease by (from <u>577</u> to <u>125</u>) by May 2008. (Truancy-absent 5 or 10 days unexcused)	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The number of incidents of truancy will decrease from <u>577</u> in 2003 to <u>125</u> in 2008.	Decrease to ___ in <u>2008</u>	___	Early Intervention	Use database to collect data on students who are tardy, cut class, leave school grounds without permission, skip school, truant students brought back to school by police, or students absent without cause. Each school has a team composed of teachers, parents, and school staff to examine the data to analyze truancy trends and put solutions in place to address each one.		x		

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System Name: Claiborne

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 3. To reduce the dropout rate for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p.11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The dropout rate will decrease .54 percentage points (from .68 % to .14 %) by 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The dropout rate will decrease from .68 % in 2003 to .14 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008	—	Dropout Reports	Use MSIS Dropout Information Report to track dropouts and reason(s) for non schooling. Design peer counseling activities to reach real and potential dropouts,			x	
									x	
					Professional Development	Provide a variety of training options to equip school officials and parents with skills to deal with dropout behavior and solutions to these issues when they occur. Analyze Graduation Rate and devise activities to increase interest of students to stay in school and complete their required Carnegie Units to obtain a high school diploma.			x	

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Code No. 1100

System Name: Claiborne

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 3. To reduce the dropout rate for each school so that students experience a continuous opportunity to learn.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The dropout rate will decrease .54 percentage points (from .68 % to .14 %) by 2008.	MSIS Reports from 2003 to 2008	The dropout rate will decrease from .68 % in 2003 to .14 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008		Parents As Teachers	Group counseling and training sessions for expectant mothers and peer coaching for students in grades 9-12. Offer child care at vocational center to keep teen mothers in school. Implement "Girl Talk" sessions through community involvement.				x
					Safe Schools Programs	School officials and community liaisons will provide orderly, non-threatening environments, and train staff on cultural sensitivity and developing family-type atmosphere for students to increase their security level of school as a safe haven.			x	

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System Name: _____ **Code No.** _____

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 4. To strengthen assets or reduce risk factors that have been linked to students' dropping out of school.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by _20_ (from _.68_ % to _.81_ %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from _.68_ % in 2003 to _81_ % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008	——	Transitioning	Focus on activities to prepare students for the transitions from elementary to middle to high school. Help students connect with at least one teacher or counselor to work with them and advise them until they complete high school.				X
					Student Progress Monitoring System	Monitor student progress and design/customize instruction to address weaknesses and challenging learning activities. Engage students in activities to keep student focused, motivated and successful.			x	

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System Name: _____ **Code No.** _____

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 4. To strengthen assets or reduce risk factors that have been linked to students' dropping out of school.

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by .20 (from .68 % to .81 %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from .68 % in 2003 to .81 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___% in 2008		Early Childhood Education	Provide students at-risk of dropping out of school with positive learning environments, appropriate academic interventions and social interventions to help them overcome problems that begin in preschool and continue through high school.		x		
					Career Education/Workforce Readiness	Hands-on options as career academics, school-to-work opportunities, community service will be used to deter truancy. The support of local business and community leaders will be enlisted to create community service projects that may lead to after school or weekend jobs.		x		

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System Name:
Code No.

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 4. To strengthen assets or reduce risk factors that have been linked to students' dropping out of school.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by 20 (from 68 % to .81 %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from .68 % in 2003 to .81 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008		Out of School Experiences	Enroll at-risk students in after school, extended day, summer school and tutoring programs; offer challenging content and relevant coursework to all learners.		X		
					Learning Style/Multiple Intelligences	Assess learning needs of students and design individual instructional plans to instruct students according to their individual learning styles and instructional levels. Move students through instructional/grade content as level of success dictates.		X		

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DROPOUT PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROPOSED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement

Code No.

System Name:

Stated Dropout Prevention Objective Addressed: 4. To strengthen assets or reduce risk factors that have been linked to students' dropping out of school.

Identified Regional or Local Needs:

Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by _20_ (from _68_ % to _81_ %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from _68_ % in 2003 to _81_ % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008	―	Teacher Support Team	Instructional faculty will be trained on all components of addressing needs of students: academic, behavioral, emotional, medical, attendance, etc. Referrals will be made to the standing committees at the building level to gather and review data to address needs of students in one or more of these target areas. Preventive and Intervention strategies will be utilized to help students experience success. Involve parents in this process to elicit their input whether the child is a regular education or special student.		X	

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The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by .20 (from .68 % to .81 %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from .68 % in 2003 to .81 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008		Title V – Innovative Programs	Scientifically based research programs and best practices that focus on what works will be implemented at all grade levels which are critical to reading success and reading instruction.			x	
					School Improvement Efforts of NCLB	Use federal funds to make needed improvements to ensure students receive high-quality education and craft lessons to make sure each student meets or exceeds the standards. Data will be used to assess how much progress students make in order to aim efforts for improving student achievement.			x	

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Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Baseline Data (%, number, or rate) Year	Year End Data	Met Yes or No	Programs	Activities	Scientifically-based (CASEL, C2-SPECTR, What Works)	Effective Strategies (NDPC)	Current State Initiatives (p. 11-13)	Other (Specify on Attachment B)
							Check One Per Activity			
The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by .20 (from 68 % to 81 %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from .68 % in 2003 to 81 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___% in 2008	—	MS Reading Sufficiency Plan	Extra time in the daily schedule will be included to engage students in interactive and recreational reading activities that will give them a variety of learning experiences to apply critical thinking and creativity into the curriculum. Self expression will be taught through interactive reading and writing activities to encourage active participation of students to keep them engaged in learning and interested in school.			x	
					Service Learning	Community volunteers recruited to provide academic learning connected to service projects. Career/academic skills will evidence learning that has occurred. Projects geared to elicit interest in students applying learned skills at classroom level to interactive learning experiences and activities.		x		

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The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by .20 (from .68 % to .81 %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from .68 % in 2003 to .81 % in 2008.	Decrease to ___% in 2008		Behavioral Strategies in the Classroom	Train instructional staff on observational techniques for identifying students with behavior and emotional issues that impede learning in order to use best practices to address these special needs to improve student performance, social interactions, conflict resolution, and self concept. Equip students with coping strategies that will improve their perception of themselves and engagement in society.			x	
					Vocational Counseling	All students will be advised as to prevalent vocations in the workforce and exposed to educational programs to assist them in contemplating a vocation to pursue for the world of work.			x	

FY Plan
FY Addendum
FY Progress Report

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DROPOUT PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROPOSED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
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The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by _20_ (from _.68_ % to _.81_ %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from _68_ % in 2003 to _81_ % in 2008.	Decrease to __ % in 2008		Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers	Teacher Quality will continue to be the deployment mechanism in which to reach at-risk students and keep them interested in learning, therefore interested in school. The District will ensure every classroom has a highly qualified teacher, one with proven knowledge of subject(s) he or she teaches.			X	
					Grace Christian Counseling Center	Counseling services will be available to students as a means of addressing their adjustment needs to help improve their interest in school. Parental involvement will be a component to address parenting skills and family issues in an effort to meet students' needs to reduce absenteeism, keep them in school, and improve students' studying habits in the home.				x

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The academic performance of students will increase to reduce as a risk factor poor academic performance by _20_ (from _68_ % to _81_ %) by 2008	NCLB Proficiency Charts and MSIS Test Reports from 2003 to 2008	The proficiency rate will increase from _68_ % in 2003 to _81_ % in 2008.	Decrease to ___ % in 2008	___	Individualized Instruction	Teachers will use best materials, proven lesson plans and textbooks aligned with state standards to meet individual needs of students according to their learning styles. Best research of what works and effective teaching strategies will be introduced in the classroom. Teachers will be trained on educational practices that work in improving student performance. Effective teaching and curricula will be used to challenge children and interest them in learning which can prevent problems of violence, misconduct and misidentification of learning disabilities. Individualized settings will be used with the best ideas and methods of instruction for children who would fail without it.		x		

Use the space below to explain the basis you are using a program or strategy is not in one of three previous categories.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____LAW ENFORCEMENT_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
"It takes a village to raise a child" is the concept behind this Program/Strategy. We must have the involvement and support of Law Enforcement to help school officials to monitor attendance of students in efforts to keep them in school. Their presence strengthens the efforts of school officials with parents and students.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____Asthma Clinic_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Students must be healthy to attend school regularly for the benefit of instruction and acquiring the necessary social skills. The Asthma Clinic is a community-based health and wellness grass roots effort to address a chronic health issue that is the leading cause of a fraction of students who are absent. Wellness activities improve the ability of students to stay healthy and therefore, stay in school.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____Perfect Attendance Incentive Program_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Recognizing achievements and attendance milestones of students are key components in motivating positive student growth and participation. Students need warm 'fuzzies' to elevate their feeling of self-worth in others recognizing that their efforts matter.

Attachment B
Supplemental Information

Use the space below to explain the basis you are using a program or strategy is not in one of three previous categories.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____Home/School Connection_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Consistent collaboration and coordination of home-to-school are key factors to keeping the family involved in monitoring school attendance and ensuring school success. This component is needed to make sure all partners play an active role in keeping students in school and keeping students learning.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____Parents As Teachers_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Community linkages and partnerships have a great impact on the family if they are the right resources to address specific problems students and families are experiencing. This community-based program is important to counseling young ladies on character development, esteem, sustaining educational goals to create a better life for themselves and their offspring. The school and family need such organizations to make a difference in the lives of young girls and their families.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____Transitioning_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Adjustment activities are important for children in coping with their environment and making wise decisions that will affect them in the world of work. The guidance they receive early during growth milestones will impact the type of individual they become and the importance they place on education and self worth.

Attachment B
Supplemental Information

Use the space below to explain the basis you are using a program or strategy is not in one of three previous categories.

Please consider the Program/Strategy: _____ Grace Christian Counseling Center_____
should be considered as a component of the dropout prevention plan.

Justification for Consideration:
Community resources that specialize in providing therapeutic help for students to ensure they are successful in school and maintain a positive attitude towards school is crucial for those students in need of this type of support.

From: Julia Odom
To: ppeterson@mde.k12.ms.us
Date: 12/15/04 4:54PM
Subject: Dropout Prevention Plan for Claiborne County Schools

Mrs. Peterson,

We are forwarding a copy of our Dropout Prevention Plan for the Claiborne County Public School District.
If you have questions regarding any of the contents, please contact us at an immediate date.

Angela Hampton
Chair
Dropout Prevention Plan Committee
Claiborne County Public Schools
404 Market Street
Port Gibson, MS 39150

Julia Odom
Recorder
Dropout Prevention Plan Committee
Claiborne County Public Schools
404 Market Street
Port Gibson, MS 39150
601-437-4232

Appendix I: 2004 MDE Dropout Prevention Plan Goals

Goal I: By 2002-2003, the Mississippi Department of Education will adopt and apply a definition of a dropout for all public schools in the state.

Goal II: By 2003-2004, the Mississippi Department of Education will utilize the Mississippi Student Information System to increase the reliability of the accountability system through improved procedures for data collection and reporting.

Goal III: By 2003-2004, the Mississippi Department of Education will provide continuous professional development to school districts on research-based strategies for improving student academic achievement.

Goal IV: By 2003-2004, the Mississippi Department of Education will provide focused technical assistance to school districts that fail to meet state/federal performance standards.

Goal V: By 2004, the Mississippi Department of Education will disseminate guidelines to school districts for the development of local dropout prevention plans.

Goal VI: By 2005-2006, all Mississippi students will be taught by "highly qualified teachers."

Goal VII: By 2007-2008, local education agencies will show evidence of annually reducing their dropout rate for grades 7-12 and the longitudinal/cohort dropout rate for grades 9-12.

Goal VIII: By 2013-2014, all Mississippi schools will reach high standards, attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.

Goal IX: By 2013-2014, all Mississippi students will graduate from high school.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education Strategic Dropout Prevention Plan 2003-2014

Appendix J: U.S. Department of Education's 11 Components of Comprehensive School Reform

1. Employs proven methods and strategies that are grounded in scientifically based research
2. Integrates a comprehensive design with aligned components
3. Provides ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers and staff
4. Includes measurable goals and benchmarks for student achievement
5. Is supported within the school by teachers, administrators and staff
6. Provides support for teachers, administrators and staff
7. Provides for meaningful parent and community involvement in planning, implementing and evaluating school improvement activities
8. Uses high-quality external technical support and assistance from an external partner with experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement
9. Annually evaluates strategies for the implementation of school reforms and for student results achievement
10. Identifies resources to support and sustain the school's comprehensive reform effort
11. Has been found to result in or has demonstrated strong evidence that it significantly improves the academic achievement of students

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education Strategic Dropout Prevention Plan 2003-2014, taken from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE.

State Plan – Three Overarching Goals

There are three overarching goals to be met for Mississippi's State Dropout Prevention Plan:

Goal I[1]: To increase the graduation rate for 9-12 cohort classes on a systematic basis to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year as mandated by Mississippi Code §37-13-80. The Office of Dropout Prevention is also responsible for establishing graduation rate benchmarks for each two-year period from the 2008-2009 school year through the 2018-2019 school year, to serve as guidelines for the graduation rate increase.

The 4-year cohort graduation rate for 2004-2005 is 61.1%. In order to attain the 85% goal by 2018-2019, the following two-year benchmarks are established[2]:

Benchmark 1 – 2008-2009	63%
Benchmark 2 – 2010-2011	66%
Benchmark 3 – 2012-2013	71%
Benchmark 4 – 2014-2015	77%
Benchmark 5 – 2016-2017	81%
Benchmark 6 – 2018-2019	85%

Mississippi Code §37-13-80:

"It is the intent of the Legislature that, through the statewide dropout prevention program and the dropout prevention programs implemented by each school district, the graduation rate for cohort classes will be increased to not less than eighty-five percent (85%) by the 2018-2019 school year. The Office of Dropout Prevention shall establish graduation rate benchmarks for each two-year period from the 2008-2009 school year through the 2018-2019 school year, which shall serve as guidelines for increasing the graduation rate for cohort classes on a systematic basis to eighty-five percent (85%) by the 2018-2019 school year."

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[1] Students earning traditional diplomas and Special Education students earning occupational diplomas are counted as graduates. Special Education students earning certificates of attendance and students earning a GED from a district program are not counted as graduates. However, these students are considered completers.

[2] Note: The benchmark rates represent 4-year graduation rates calculated for cohorts of students beginning with ninth graders four years prior to the stated school year. For example, the benchmark for 2008-2009 will be compared to the 4-year graduation rate for the student cohort beginning with ninth graders in school year 2005-2006 (SY0506G09).

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

Goal II[3]: By 2012-2013, initiatives instituted by the Office of Dropout Prevention will reduce the state dropout rate by 50%.

With a current state 9-12 dropout rate of 26.6%, in order to reduce the dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013, the following annual benchmarks are established[4]:

Benchmark 1 – 2008-2009	25%
Benchmark 2 – 2009-2010	22%
Benchmark 3 – 2010-2011	18%
Benchmark 4 – 2011-2012	15%
Benchmark 5 – 2012-2013	13%

Goal III: By 2012-2013, initiatives instituted by the Office of Dropout Prevention will reduce the statewide truancy rate[5] by 50%.

With a current state truancy rate of 31.8%, in order to reduce the truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013, the following benchmarks are established:

Benchmark 1 – 2008-2009	30%
Benchmark 2 – 2009-2010	28%
Benchmark 3 – 2020-2012	23%
Benchmark 4 – 2012-2013	19%
Benchmark 5 – 2013-2014	16%

Given these three overarching goals, the following pages detail the Mississippi Department of Education's State Plan for Dropout Prevention – the means by which the state will achieve the benchmarks set above. The foundation of the plan is the mapping of current and proposed state and district level initiatives to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's fifteen strategies for dropout prevention. This framework will be used to assist in the development of local district plans, and to measure the effectiveness of these plans. The MDE will provide analyses of various data elements to districts, as well as national best practices research.

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[3] A dropout is defined as an individual who:
- Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year
- Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year
- Has not graduated from high school
- And does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
  - Transfer to another public school district, private school or State/District approved educational program
  - Temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved absence
  - Death

[4] Note: The benchmark rates represent 4-year ("9-12") dropout rates calculated for cohorts of students beginning with ninth graders four years prior to the stated school year. For example, the benchmark for 2008-2009 will be compared to the 4-year dropout rates for the student cohort beginning with ninth graders in school year 2005-2006 (Cohort SY0506G09). The dropout rates used for assessing performance on Goal #2 will differ from dropout rates calculated for 6-year ("7-12") cohorts.

[5] The MDE truancy rate calculation is determined by the following formula:
Numerator: Number of students with five or more unexcused absences (truant student)
Denominator: Count of Student Membership – Cumulative Enrollment
Multiplied by 100 to create a percentage value

15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention

Since 1986, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) has conducted and analyzed research, sponsored extensive workshops, and collaborated with a variety of practitioners to further the mission of reducing America's dropout rate by meeting the needs of youth in at-risk situations, including students with disabilities.

Students report a variety of reasons for dropping out of school; therefore, the solutions are multidimensional. The NDPC/N has identified 15 Effective Strategies that have the most positive impact on the high school graduation rate. These strategies appear to be independent but actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone programs (i.e. mentoring or family engagement projects), positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers. Following the 15 strategies listed below is an application of the strategies to district, elementary, middle, and high school. These applications form the foundation for Mississippi's State-Level Dropout Prevention Plan, and offer guidance to the development of a district dropout prevention plan.

School and Community Perspective

Strategy 1	**Systemic Renewal** – A continuing process of evaluating goals and objectives related to school policies, practices and organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners.
Strategy 2	**School-Community Collaboration** – When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure sustains a caring supportive environment where youth can thrive and achieve.
Strategy 3	**Safe Learning Environments** – A comprehensive violence prevention plan, including conflict resolution, must deal with potential violence as well as crisis management. A safe learning environment provides daily experiences, at all grade levels that enhance positive social attitudes and effective interpersonal skills in all students.

Early Interventions

Strategy 4	**Family Engagement** – Research consistently finds that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school.
Strategy 5	**Early Childhood Education** – Birth-to-five interventions demonstrate that providing a child additional enrichment can enhance brain development. The most effective way to reduce the number of children who will ultimately drop out is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of their school experience through the primary grades.
Strategy 6	**Early Literacy Development** – Early interventions to help low-achieving students improve their reading and writing skills establish the necessary foundation for effective learning in all other subjects.

Basic Core Strategies

Strategy 7   **Mentoring/Tutoring** – Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs such as reading, writing, or math competencies.

Strategy 8   **Service-Learning** – Service-learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning. This teaching/learning method promotes personal and social growth, career development, and civic responsibility and can be a powerful vehicle for effective school reform at all grade levels.

Strategy 9   **Alternative Schooling** – Alternative schooling provides potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the student's individual social needs and academic requirements for a high school diploma.

Strategy 10   **After-School Opportunities** – Many schools provide after-school and summer enhancement programs that eliminate information loss and inspire interest in a variety of areas. Such experiences are especially important for students at risk of school failure because these programs fill the afternoon "gap time" with constructive and engaging activities.

Making the Most of Education

Strategy 11   **Professional Development** – Teachers who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need to feel supported and have an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills and techniques, and to learn about innovative strategies.

Strategy 12   **Active Learning** – Active learning embraces teaching and learning strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. Students find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners when educators show them that there are different ways to learn.

Strategy 13   **Educational Technology** – Technology offers some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction to engage students in authentic learning, addressing multiple intelligences, and adapting to students' learning styles.

Strategy 14   **Individualized Instruction** – Each student has unique interests and past learning experiences. An individualized instructional program for each student allows for flexibility in teaching methods and motivational strategies to consider these individual differences.

Strategy 15   **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** – A quality CTE program and a related guidance program are essential for all students. School-to-work programs recognize that youth need specific skills to prepare them to measure up to the larger demands of today's workplace.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

Implementation Goals and Timeline

In addition to the current state initiatives listed above, the following implementation goals propose further state-level initiatives, and provide timelines for the state and local districts to follow in the implementation of the goals.

Implementation Goal I: The Mississippi Department of Education will provide comparative data on Mississippi's grade 9-12 cohort dropout rate and grade 7-12 cohort dropout rate. Data will be reported according to the following timeline:

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2001-2002

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2002-2003

- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2003-2004

- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 6-year (7-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with seventh grade students in 2001-2002

Note: By April 1 each year, 4-year (9-12) and 6-year (7-12) rates will be provided for the next set of student cohorts. Since the first 6-year (7-12) rates cannot be provided until April 2008, comparisons for early years of program implementation will rely on 4-year (9-12) rates.

Implementation Goal II: By April 2, 2007, local school districts shall submit to the MDE a list of areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Dropout Prevention Team.

The Dropout Prevention Team is a collaborative team comprised of members from various backgrounds. The responsibilities of the Dropout Prevention Team will include assisting with the development of a local strategic plan for increasing the district graduation rate, while reducing the dropout rate, by accomplishing the following:

- Identifying
  - Students at risk for academic failure in the district
  - Resources for training educators in regards to cultural sensitivity, working with students in poverty, and issues related to student diversity

- Developing
  - A plan that incorporates support programs for at-risk students
  - Policy statements regarding district-level dropout prevention strategies
  - A plan for the coordination and cooperation among school officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues, to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school
  - Programs that provide positive alternatives to students at risk
  - Plans that incorporate parent trainings that provide strategies for motivating their children to stay in school

- Implementing
  - Efforts in educational systems that address bullying and harassment
  - Staff development training that incorporates instructional strategies for student motivation and participation in learning

To support state-community partnerships, participants from the following groups shall be considered for participation on the Dropout Prevention Team:

Local Civic/Governmental Agency Representatives
- Mayor/Councilman/Alderman
- Judge/Court Administrator
- Government Agency (i.e. DHS, RESA's, etc.)
- Community and Junior College
- College/University
- Law Enforcement
- Juvenile Justice System

Local Community Representatives
- Parents
- Business Partners
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Faith-Based Organization
- Other County/Community Agency (i.e. grassroots advocacy group)

School-Related Staff
- Superintendent
- Alternative Education Representative
- Principals (Elementary, Middle, and High School)
- Special Education Director
- School Attendance Officer(s)
- School Counselors
- School Social Worker
- School Health Council Member
- Students
- Lead Teacher (Elementary, Middle, and High School)

Implementation Goal III: By May 1, 2007, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the guidelines for a dropout prevention needs assessment. The guidelines will allow district Dropout Prevention Teams to develop a systematic set of procedures to: 1) determine needs of students at risk of dropping out, and recent re-enrollees from the juvenile justice system; 2) examine the nature and causes of dropping out; and, 3) setting priorities for future action. Staff members from the Office of Dropout Prevention will be available to provide technical assistance to districts in the development of their needs assessment.

MDE guidelines will aid districts:

- Explore "What Is"
  - Identify concerns
  - Determine measurable indicators
  - Consider data sources
  - Decide preliminary priorities

- Gather and Analyze Data
  - Utilize MSIS data to determine target groups
  - Prioritize needs
  - Identify causes

- Make Decisions for the Future
  - Set priority needs
  - Identify current initiatives
  - Consider possible additional solutions

Implementation Goal IV: During the MDE Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities will be available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment.

Implementation Goal V: During the MDE Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Plan (LDP) for Dropout Prevention. The district framework will include model implementation timelines, regional training schedules and required deliverables for Local Dropout Prevention Team meetings. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).

Developed by the district Dropout Prevention Teams, and utilizing the outcomes of the needs assessment, the LDPT will detail the implementation of current district-level initiatives related to K-12 dropout prevention, in addition to proposed initiatives. Components of the plan shall include the following:

1. A LDP cover sheet and Dropout Prevention Team sign-off sheet and statement of assurance, containing the following information:
   - The district name and a list of the schools within the district
   - The local contact person's name, position, title, address, telephone number, and fax number
   - The approval signature of the district superintendent and school board chair
   - The signature of the school's principal and

2. Outcomes of the needs assessment
   - Identification of students in need of targeted assistance
   - Identification of potential risk factors
   - Prioritization of needs

3. Details of current district initiatives
   - Addressing the MDE's Five Strategic Initiatives
   - Addressing the National Dropout Prevention Center's (NDPC) 15 Strategies for Dropout Prevention
   - Highlighting school level impact (elementary, middle, high school)

4. Proposed initiatives with prioritized actions

5. Both current and proposed initiatives should include :

   - District goals that describe the overall end result the district wishes to achieve to address dropout prevention. (Note: Local districts may require school-level plans based on individual school needs and variations in dropout rates). The goals should be:
     o Derived from the prioritized needs of the school
     o Stated in terms of student outcomes
     o Measurable
     o Specific and clear
     o Achievable
     o Long-term (three to five years)
     o Based on established start date and completion dates

   - Benchmarks to serve as implementation checkpoints, to allow a district to assess how well it is progressing towards its goal.
   - A description of the persons who will be responsible for the implementation of the goal.
   - An evaluation component that provides evidence of the achievement of the objective. The evaluation component should:
     o Be measurable

o Be directly related to the objective

o Include evaluation data collected along the way (when possible)

o Identify the source of evaluation information identified

6. Plans will initially be reviewed my MDE staff members. Further monitoring and review of implementation will be the responsibility of the Office of Dropout Prevention.

Implementation Goal VI: **During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans.** Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:

- September – Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
- October – Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
- November – Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts

Implementation Goal VII: **Local districts shall submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule:**

- Northern School Districts – February 1, 2008
- Central School Districts – March 3, 2008
- Southern School Districts – April 1, 2008

Implementation Goal VIII: **Local school boards shall adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.**

Implementation Goal IX: **Local plans shall be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.** The completed plan, with the components described in Goal III, will represent the district's plan for assisting the state in achieving its three overarching goals of increasing the graduation rate, reducing the dropout rate, and reducing the truancy rate within the proposed

benchmarks. The plan will be evaluated annually by MDE staff, based on the evaluation criteria set forth in the LDP, and the MDE's overall evaluation criteria.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

Critical Components

In addition to the implementation goals listed above, the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Dropout Prevention will continue to develop programs to address the overarching goals of increasing the state's graduation, decreasing the dropout rate and decreasing the truancy rate. The following information is a listing of the critical components to be implemented at the state and local levels.

Critical Component #1 **Public Relations Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign**
As a partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education, local businesses and the media, this statewide branding initiative will serve to disseminate information on the importance of staying in school, and the state's dropout prevention efforts. Particular target areas for information dissemination will include grassroots groups including churches, civic and community organizations, and parent advocacy groups.

Critical Component #2 **Assessment of Current Initiatives**
Based on the current initiatives listed in Appendix A of this document, program assessments will be conducted to determine the level of implementation and overall impact of each program on dropout prevention. This work will be done in partnership with various divisions within the MDE. A primary focus area for this initiative will be the application of the Coordinated School Health Plan to the work of dropout prevention.

Critical Component #3 **School Attendance Officer (SAO) Staff Refocusing Study**
Consideration is being given to refocusing the roles and responsibilities of School Attendance Officers to be more applied towards dropout prevention initiatives. The purpose of the SAO staff refocusing study will be explore ways in which the current roles and responsibilities of the SAO's can be refocused so that SAO's may become the district-level specialists in the work of dropout prevention. The new roles, when redesigned, will result in the SAO's acting as MDE liaisons at the district level, and assisting with the coordination of efforts with other school personnel (i.e. school counselors, school resource/safety officers, school social workers, school psychologists).

Critical Component #4 **Dropout Recovery Program**
For students beyond the compulsory school attendance age, dropout and credit recovery programs will be developed in partnership with the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges. This

program will allow young adults the opportunity to either earn sufficient credits to graduate with a regular diploma, or to obtain a GED.

Critical Component #5   Transition Plans for Dropout Prevention

Transition plans that have proven successful as dropout prevention plans will be implemented at the following research-based critical transition points for students. These points are critical in that they address both developmental and academic transition points for student.
a) Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten
b) Grade 3 to Grade 4
c) Grade 5 to Grade 6
d) Grade 8 to Grade 9
e) Recent re-enrollees from the juvenile justice system
e) Grade 12 to Postsecondary/Workforce

Critical Component #6   Federal Programs/Funding Opportunities

The MDE Office of Dropout Prevention will explore the availability of federal funding opportunities for dropout prevention and/or federal programs to target dropout prevention.

Critical Component #7   Research Partnerships

Recognizing that many proposed dropout prevention strategies will involve changes to current legislative policies, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention will partner with SERVE and other national research organizations to investigate the ways in which the implementation of dropout prevention plans have impacted local, state, and legislative policies in other states.

Beginning in February 2007, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention, along with other MDE staff, will begin research and development initiatives for each component. By April 2007, Dropout Prevention Taskforce meetings will convene based on each component, with representation from Local Dropout Prevention team members, to set timelines for implementation and methods for evaluation for each component.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

Appendix A

State Initiatives

This section presents information on various initiatives and programs that support dropout prevention throughout the Mississippi Department of Education.

SUPERINTENDENT'S STRATEGIES

Dr. Hank Bounds, State Superintendent for Mississippi, has developed five strategies for making the changes necessary to improve the educational system, economic development and quality of life in this state dramatically. Following are the Five Strategies for Improving Education in Mississippi, and descriptions of the ways in which the initiatives are being used as dropout prevention strategies.

Strategy I: Increase the rigor of the curriculum and assessment system.

Providing students with a rich and challenging experience in the classroom that will prepare them for the future is a key element to keeping them engaged and in school. Students today will not be competing against someone from around the corner for jobs. They must be competitive with students from other states and all over the world.

In addition, both the *No Child Left Behind* Act and the Mississippi Accountability System include serious consequences for schools that do not make the mark. To ensure that our schools meet both state and federal accountability requirements and that Mississippi's students are prepared for post-secondary education and to enter the workforce in the future, we must raise the bar. The rigor of our assessments must be increased in step with the curriculum to ensure that students are in fact learning what they need to learn to succeed.

We used a portion of the federal hurricane recovery funds to contract with a service provider to create curriculum guides in Language Arts, Reading, and Mathematics for those districts that lost their materials during Hurricane Katrina. Available to all Mississippi teachers, but not mandated, the guides will be aligned to the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks for language arts and mathematics and are grounded in recent, scientifically-based research on teaching and learning. The overarching goal is a responsive curriculum that will facilitate teachers in helping each student to reach his or her maximum potential.

Teachers can use the Student Progress Monitoring System (SPMS) track student progress in real time. Introduced by the state to support rigorous teaching and assessment by providing a bank of test items (multiple-choice, short answer, and writing prompts) that teachers, schools, and districts could use that are aligned to the curriculum frameworks, the SPMS is a web-based tool to assist with the development, administration, scoring and performance tracking of practice tests, informative assignments and assessments. The system allows educators to create practice tests, informative assignments, quizzes or homework using the question pool and to analyze student-specific performance data and generate reports.

SOURCE: Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Plan, 2007-2019.

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With SPMS, teachers are able to analyze student performance on assessments down to the individual MS Framework Competency and administer diagnostic or district-created assessments to students on-line or by printing them out for paper-and-pencil administration. Paper/pencil assignments can be scored by scanning bubble sheets into the system.

The Second Edition of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT2) is scheduled to be field tested in May of 2007 and administered for the first time in May 2008. Administered in grades 3-8, the MCT2 will have one test for language arts, which will allow reading and language competencies to be assessed in one test and eliminate a day of testing. Grades 3-8 are the only grades required by the No Child Left Behind Act and only two states require testing in second grade.

The MCT2 will make the connection between the curriculum and assessment clearer to educators, students, parents and the public. It will match the expectations in the assessment to the expectations of the curriculum and show progression across grades.
To increase the rigor the high school curriculum, the State Board of Education approved increasing the graduation requirements for all students. Beginning with ninth graders entering in the fall of 2008, students will be required to complete four years of English, math, science, and social studies. In math, two of the fours years of math will have to be beyond Algebra I. In science, students must take at least one lab-based course, and in social studies students will have to take economics.

Strategy II: Increase the quality and quantity of teachers.

In Mississippi, we have both a quantity and a quality issue with teachers. In some cases, we have a teacher shortage. Certain geographical areas of the state continue to have trouble hiring enough teachers each school year to meet their needs. We have trouble finding adequate staff for particular subject areas, such as special education, science, mathematics or foreign language, in areas all over the state.

During the 2003-04 school year, the teacher preparation programs at the eight public universities and seven private colleges admitted 1,608 students. Mississippi-approved teacher education programs graduated 1,572 candidates. Of those graduates, 70 percent (1,112) were licensed and employed in Mississippi as first-year teachers within a year after the close of the academic term in which they graduated. In Mississippi, we lose approximately 50 percent of new teachers within the first five years of teaching, which is on par with national statistics.
In some cases, teachers do not possess the skill set necessary for moving a student or class forward and make significant gains in student achievement. Teachers are the single most important factor in determining student success, so we must ensure that we have an excellent teacher in every classroom.

To address the preparation issue, Dr. Tom Meredith, the Commissioner of the Institutions of Higher Learning, and State Superintendent of Education Dr. Hank M. Bounds have established a Blue Ribbon Committee to examine every facet of Mississippi's teacher education programs and develop new ways to ensure that teachers are prepared to move students forward from the first day in the classroom. The members represent a wide variety of educators, from new teachers who hold a bachelor's degree to veteran teachers with doctorates, principals to superintendents, and board members from local school boards, the Mississippi Board of Education and the Institutions of

Higher Learning. There are also representatives from business, the Governor's Office and the Legislature on the committee.

Strategy III: Increase the quality and quantity of administrators.

Mississippi faces similar challenges with administrators that we do with teachers. In some areas, we face a shortage of qualified administrators. Some administrators lack the skills necessary to accelerate student learning for a school or a district. Each teacher depends on the support from district administrators and principals, who serve as the instructional leaders for their schools. Leadership is a crucial element for any organization. Just like business and government, schools need good leaders in order to flourish.

The Mississippi School Administrator Sabbatical Program enables local school districts to grant sabbatical leave to licensed teachers employed in Mississippi schools for not less than three years. The purpose is to allow such teachers to participate full-time in an educational leadership program and become local school district administrators. Five districts participated in this program in 2004-05, with 12 sabbaticals awarded and over $400,000 expended.

We are pursuing grants from private foundations to build a center for education innovation and professional development. The center will provide world-class professional development on utilizing proven, research-based strategies to improve student learning outcomes. Teachers, administrators and all school staff will benefit from the programs and services offered by the center. The goals of the center will be to improve and increase curricula and assessment, improve teacher quality and quantity, improve administrator quality and quantity, community development, and fundraising. The center will provide the leadership, infrastructure and governance of the overall effort to transform Mississippi's educational system.

Strategy IV: Create a culture in Mississippi that understands the value of education.

Unfortunately, the culture in Mississippi is not one that supports education. This certainly contributes to the dropout problem. Although many of Mississippi's citizens suffer the consequences of being uneducated or undereducated through a lifetime of low employability and low wages, they often do not perceive education to be a way out of that cycle for their children and therefore do not place a high priority on attending or completing school. Dropping out of school and earning low wages then becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. Students from low-income families have a dropout rate of 10 percent, students from middle-income families have a dropout rate of 5.2 percent and only 1.6 percent of students from high-income families drop out of school, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center.

The level of funding, which is usually ranked near the bottom on comparisons of other states, is another indicator that education is not valued. However, the economic cost of underfunding education is quite clear. A report released in March by the Alliance for Excellent Education noted Princeton University researcher Cecilia Rouse's findings that the lifetime difference in income between a high school graduate and a dropout is approximately $260,000. The report also concluded that the lost lifetime earnings of students in Mississippi who did not graduate with their class in 2004 is approximately $4,300,920,000.

The state must also bear additional costs in terms of assistance to families and children. Teen girls in the bottom 20 percent of basic reading and math skills are five times more likely to become mothers over a two-year high school period than teen girls in the top 20 percent. Male and female students with low academic achievement are twice as likely to become parents by their senior year of high school compared to students with high academic achievement.

We spend more trying to keep Mississippians from dropping litter on the highways than we do trying to keep students from dropping out of school. When looking at the impact that education has on economic development, tax revenues, and the need for governmental assistance, it is obvious that underfunding our schools ultimately costs much more than appropriately funding education.

The Mississippi Department of Education is working with the Mississippi Economic Council to garner private funds to launch a branding campaign to influence students to stay in school and the community to support schools and students.

Strategy V: Redesign education for the 21st Century workforce in Mississippi.

While Mississippi has been making strides in student achievement, particularly in closing the achievement gap, the state still ranks near the bottom on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP exams are considered the nation's report card. Even with the recent teacher salary increase, Mississippi still ranks near the bottom in average teacher salary. We have far too many students who are not receiving a high school diploma. The draft plan, *Redesigning Education for the 21st Century in Mississippi,* is designed to increase the rigor and relevance of the high school curriculum, increase the number and skill level of Mississippi's graduates and to increase economic development in the state by increasing and improving the labor pool.

We begin by strengthening pre-kindergarten programs. Some children grow up in print-rich environments and are read to from birth. Some do not. Some children arrive at the first day of kindergarten molded, refined and ready to learn. Some do not. Mississippi is in the minority; most states offer universal pre-k programs. An investment in pre-k has the potential to pay great dividends down the road through a reduction in need for social services, a reduction in crime and an increase in tax revenues as these children grow into adults.

Mississippi must also help give students greater direction at the middle school level. Middle school students need to explore the possibilities of what life can bring and understand the relevance between what they are learning in class and what they will be doing in life.

In high school, students can select coursework based on seven career pathways:
- Health Care
- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Construction and Manufacturing
- Transportation
- Business Management and Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
- Human Services

These seven pathways were selected by looking at where the growth is and will be. First determining which industries will have the job opportunities for today's students, we then looked at how to prepare these students to enter these jobs. Some will enter their careers by obtaining a four-year degree; some will enter their careers by going to a community college; others will enter the workforce directly from high school. We looked at how to prepare students for each of these three entry levels. This represents a major shift in thinking. For too long, an individual's career was chosen by how they were prepared. We want to prepare students for the career they choose.

One tool that we will use to do this is technology. We will use online counseling for both parents and children to help them make informed decisions throughout elementary, middle and secondary school. We will also use online courses to provide additional flexibility and prepare them to use technology throughout their careers. We plan to require each student in the ninth grade to take at least one online course and will be only the second state in the nation to do so.

This is a bold vision for education and for Mississippi. The educational system cannot accomplish this alone. We must have support from parents, business, community, and state leaders to turn this plan into action and prepare our students to compete for the jobs of the future.

OFFICE OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ENFORCEMENT

What is a school attendance officer?

A school attendance officer is an individual, employed by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to investigate, review, and manage truancy referrals from assigned schools in order to enforce the provisions of the Compulsory School Attendance Law.

What are the specific tasks of a school attendance officer?

It is the duty of each school attendance officer to:
- Cooperate with any public agency to locate and identify all compulsory-school age children who are not attending school
- Cooperate with all courts of competent jurisdiction
- Investigate all cases of nonattendance and unlawful absences by compulsory school-age children not enrolled in a nonpublic school
- Provide appropriate counseling to encourage all school-age children to attend school until they completed high school
- Attempt to secure the provision of social or welfare services that may be required to enable any child to attend school
- Contact the home or place or residence of a compulsory-school-age child and any other place in which the officer is likely to find any compulsory-child when the child is absent from school during school hours without a valid written excuse from school officials, and when the child is found, the officer shall notify the parents and school officials as to where the child was physically located
- Contact promptly the home of each compulsory-school-age child in the school district within the officer's jurisdiction who is not enrolled in school or is not in attendance at public school and is without a valid written excuse from school officials; if no valid excuse is found for the

Appendix P: Brief Description of 10 of the 50 "Exemplary" Programs Researched by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

Program	Overview	Research Evidence
Check & Connect	Increasing student school engagement through relationship building, monitoring of disengagement warning signs, interventions individualized to student needs, development of problem-solving skills, and the encouragement of participation in extracurricular activities. A key factor in the Check & Connect model is the monitor, who is responsible for assessing levels of student engagement and for implementing basic and intensive interventions.	Four longitudinal studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs have been carried out on Check & Connect across all school levels. Compared to students in control or comparison groups, students served by the program showed significant decreases in truancy, decreases in absenteeism, decreases in dropout rates, increases in credit accrual, and increases in school completion.
Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (VYP)	An international cross-age tutoring program in which secondary at-risk students work with at-risk elementary students. The program philosophy revolves around seven key tenets that emphasize the valuing of students, such as that all students can learn, that the school values all students, and that all students can actively contribute to their own education and to the education of others.	Some elements critical to program success were fidelity to program components, a minimum age of tutors, and a four-grade difference between tutors and tutees. The primary program evaluation used a quasi-experimental design with a matched comparison group for up to two years after the program was implemented. Compared to the comparison group, student participants had significantly higher reading grades, significantly better attitudes toward school (including liking school and commitment to schoolwork) and lower dropout rates.
Families and Schools Together	A collaborative, multifamily, group program that combines concepts and practices of community organizing with	Four studies carried out by three groups of independent researchers on FAST using experimental designs showed significant

	effective clinical techniques based on family therapy and play therapy. The program works to intervene early to help at-risk youths succeed in the community, at home, and in school and thus avoid problems such as adolescent delinquency, violence, and school failure and dropout. FAST offers youths structured opportunities for relationship-building interactions with the primary caretaking parent, other family members, other families and peers, and offers parents training and coached practice in family management and communication skills.	improvements for both parents and children after the program and up to two years later. Specifically, studies showed, as compared to control groups improvement in conduct disorder, anxiety, and attention span in classrooms, reductions after two years in aggression, improvements in academic performance, increased parent involvement in school, and increased pursuit of adult education by parents.
Good Behavior Game	A classroom, team-based, behavior modification program designed to improve children's adaptation to classroom rules/authority, improve aggressive/disruptive classroom behavior, and prevent later criminality. It is implemented when children are in the early elementary grades in order to provide students with the skills they need to respond to later, possibly negative life experiences and societal influences. The GBG utilizes a group-based approach in which students are assigned reading units and cannot advance until a majority of the class has mastered the previous set of learning objectives. It aims to decrease early aggression and shy behaviors to prevent later criminality. GBG improves teachers' ability to define tasks, set rules, and discipline students, and allows students to work in teams in which each individual is responsible to the rest of the	Two evaluations have been carried out on the program in a large urban area. In the most recent study, five years after the intervention (6th grade), researchers found for participating children, as compared to control group children, had significantly fewer meeting the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder, fewer receiving or having been judged to need mental health services, fewer suspensions from school in the last year, significantly better ratings on conduct problems from their teachers, and lower levels of aggression among males who were rated highest for aggression in 1st grade.

Program	Description	Evaluation
	group.	Studies support the effectiveness of the MDFT treatment system among diverse samples of adolescents, including several randomized controlled clinical trials. Studies found that, compared to other types of treatment, MDFT significantly decreased substance abuse, with gains maintained up to one year post-treatment, decreased delinquent behavior, arrests, and placement on probation, reduced affiliation with delinquent and drug-using peers, decreased disruptive school behavior over comparison youth, and increased rate of passing grades over comparison youth. When used for prevention, compared with controls, adolescents who received MDFT exhibited an increased bonding to school and decreased association with antisocial peers.
Multidimensional Family Therapy	A comprehensive and flexible family-based program for substance-abusing adolescents or those at high risk for substance use and other problem behaviors. MDFT is a multi-component and multilevel intervention system. There is also a substance abuse prevention version of MDFT for early adolescents. Interventions are solution-focused and strive to obtain immediate and practical impact on the youth's everyday environment.	
Parenting Wisely	A self-administered, computer-based program that teaches parents and their children important skills to enhance relationships and decrease conflict through behavior management and support. The program concentrates on families with parents who do not usually seek or complete mental health or parent education treatment for children's problem behaviors. Single-parent families and stepfamilies with children who exhibit behavior problems constitute most of the families targeted.	Thirteen evaluations have been conducted on PW across a variety of settings. Five studies involved random assignment of parents to treatment and control groups. The program was found to significantly reduce problem conduct/behavior in children and improve parental involvement with children and their schoolwork.
Project Toward No Drug Abuse (Project TND)	An interactive school-based program designed to help high school youth resist	TND has been evaluated numerous times with both alternative and mainstream high

	substance use. The program teaches participants increased coping and self-control skills by making them aware of misleading information that facilitates drug use. The program motivates them not to use drugs, to develop skills that help them bond to lower-risk environments, to appreciate the physical consequences that drug use may have on their own lives, to become aware of cessation strategies, and to develop decision-making skills to make a commitment to not use drugs.	schools, primarily using a randomized block design to assign schools. For TND to show significant one-year effects, all 12 sessions should be implemented. In one study, health educator-led programs had significant results while those using self-instruction did not. After a one-year follow-up, results for both alternative and mainstream high schools revealed that, compared to those in control groups, students receiving TND had significant reductions in hard drug use, had significant reductions in marijuana use, had significant reductions in alcohol use, had significantly lower risk of victimization, and were less likely to carry weapons.
Quantum Opportunities	Designed to help at-risk youth make a "quantum leap" up the ladder of opportunity through academic, developmental, and community service activities, coupled with a sustained relationship with a peer group and a caring adult, offered to them over their four years of high school. The QOP framework strives to compensate for some of the deficits found in poverty areas by (a) compensating for both the perceived and real lack of opportunities, which are characteristic of disadvantaged neighborhoods; (b) providing interactions and involvement with persons who hold pro-social values and beliefs; (c) enhancing participants' academic and functional skills to equip them for success; and (d) reinforcing positive achievements and	Two multi-site experimental studies were carried out from 9th grade through expected time of graduation and statistically significant results were consistently found at one site in one of the studies. The key at this site was dosage and fidelity to the program model. Compared to the control group, youth at this site became teen parents less often, had higher academic and functional skills, were more likely to graduate, and had higher educational expectations and were more likely to attend postsecondary schools.

	actions.
Schools and Families Educating Children (SAFE Children)	A community- and school-based program that helps families manage educational and child development in inner-city communities where children are at high risk for substance abuse and other problem behaviors. The program aims to help children make the transition into 1st grade, have a successful first year, and set a strong base for the future. The program, based on a developmental-ecological perspective, focuses on enhancing parenting and family management skills, strengthening the relationship between the families and the schools, and improving reading skills in the children.	Training staff and fidelity to the program model are required to achieve reported results. The SAFE Children project was evaluated in a fully randomized trial across eight inner-city schools in one city over a 24-month period. After six months, compared to a control group, participating children had greater improvement in academic achievement, reading scores approximating the national average, and improvements made in aggression and social competence. After six months, compared to a control group, participating parents showed better parental involvement in school.
Too Good for Violence (TGFV)	A school-based violence prevention/character education program that improves student behavior and minimizes aggression. TGFV helps students in kindergarten through 12th grade learn the skills they need to get along peacefully with others. In both content and teaching methods, the program teaches students positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It builds skills sequentially and at each grade level provides developmentally appropriate curricula designed to address the most significant risk and protective factors.	Five studies conducted by independent evaluators have examined the effectiveness of TGFV, primarily examining pre-/post-test comparisons between treatment and control groups. Teachers generally observed significantly more prosocial behaviors by students. Among high school students, grades 9-12, there were reductions in intentions to drink alcohol, smoke marijuana, and fight.

SOURCE: "Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report," The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and Communities in Schools.

Appendix Q: Southern Regional Education Board's 10 Strategies for Improving High School Graduation Rates and Student Achievement and Examples of How to Implement the Strategies

1. Set up a state accountability system that encourages schools to take responsibility for increasing the achievement and graduation rates of all students.

   a. Give the same weight to high school completion that the state gives to meeting achievement targets.

   b. Broaden the accountability index and give greater weight to students who meet achievement targets and meet higher-level academic standards or demonstrate mastery in a career/technical field of study.

2. Getting students ready for challenging high school studies is the primary mission of middle school education.

   a. Develop readiness standards in language arts/reading, mathematics and science for doing challenging high school work in grade nine and align the middle grades curriculum and instruction to them.

   b. Establish policies to increase annually the percentages of eighth-graders taking and succeeding in pre-algebra and Algebra I.

3. Focus attention on the middle grades to ninth-grade transition.

   a. Improve the ninth-grade student to teacher ratio.

   b. Provide opportunities for students to explore careers and future education options no later than grade nine.

4. Require all students to complete a solid academic core.

   a. Align all courses to grade level and to college- and career-readiness standards.

   b. Create or adopt common low-stakes, end-of-program exams that career/technical teachers can use to determine whether students have mastered key academic and technical concepts.

5. Have students take additional academic courses in mathematics and science or humanities beyond the required core or complete a planned sequence of courses in a career field.

   a. Expanding opportunities for students to take advanced-level academic courses such as Advanced Placement.

   b. Setting eligible criteria for dual enrollment courses that are comparable to college admissions standards.

6. Create partnerships with employers, community and technical colleges and shared-time career/technical centers to provide students access to high-quality career/technical studies in high-demand fields.

   a. Make career/technical teachers strong partners in preparing students academically for college and careers.

b. Establish policies that strengthen the academic focus of high school career/technical courses, create new courses that integrate academic and career/technical content and help more students meet college- and career-readiness standards.

7. Require schools to develop an extra-help system to provide recovery when students fail a grade or a course and to help them pass high-stakes exams.

   a. Using technology to give students the option to take and retake courses necessary for graduation outside of regular school hours.

   b. Providing students with special tutoring from their teachers before and after school or on Saturdays to help them meet course standards.

8. Make full use of the senior year to get students ready to graduate and prepared for their next step.

   a. Identify students who plan to go on for postsecondary studies, but who fail to meet career- and college-readiness standards by the end of grade 11 in English/reading or mathematics. Enroll them in special, senior-year transition courses in English/reading and mathematics.

   b. Assign a high school completion counselor to ensure that every student knows what they must do to graduate and that each student is vigorously pursuing steps necessary to graduate from high school on time.

9. Develop a special emphasis on the lowest-performing high schools in the state, including those with the lowest achievement and the lowest high school completion rates.

   a. Provide high-quality training for district staff and key high school academic and career/technical teachers on how to align their assignments and classroom assessments to high school graduation and career- and college-readiness strategies that engage and motivate students to master content.

   b. Support schools in organizing into small learning communities centered on a career theme aligned with a rigorous academic core.

10. Develop teams of district and school leaders to help chronically low-performing, low-completion-rate high schools.

    a. Provide training for leadership teams at low-performing schools to enable them to implement their schools' improvement plans.

    b. Recruit, train and certify principals who can lead instruction and promote student achievement in low-performing high schools.

SOURCE: Southern Regional Education Board, *10 Strategies for Improving High School Graduation Rates and Student Achievement.*

The Mississippi Legislature

Joint Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review

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December 11, 2007

Honorable Haley Barbour, Governor
Honorable Amy Tuck, Lieutenant Governor
Honorable Billy McCoy, Speaker of the House
Members of the Mississippi State Legislature

Ladies and Gentlemen:
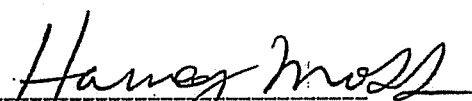
As a general practice, PEER allows agencies ten working days to respond to a PEER draft report. PEER asked MDE to review the draft of *A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program* either on November 16, 2007, or at any time during the week of November 19, which would have given the department more than ten working days to submit a response by PEER's mailout deadline of December 4 for its scheduled December meeting. The department informed PEER staff that due to a scheduling conflict, the State Superintendent of Education would not be available to review the draft until November 26th, leaving only seven working days to draft the department's response before PEER's original deadline.

In an attempt to accommodate both the superintendent's schedule and the PEER Committee's meeting deadline, PEER extended the deadline for the response to noon on December 10, thereby allowing the department ten working days from the date that the superintendent was available to review the report. While MDE staff reviewed the draft on four occasions, the superintendent wrote his response without ever personally reviewing the PEER report.

After a careful review of MDE's response, in light of the staff's work and supporting documentation, the PEER Committee stands behind its report as drafted. PEER categorically denies all MDE allegations that the review was inaccurate, biased, improperly motivated, and lacked objectivity.

In its efforts to achieve ambitious dropout prevention program goals established by the Legislature and by MDE staff, the department would be well advised to consider carefully and address all concerns expressed in PEER's report.

Sincerely,

Representative Harvey Moss, Chair

Senator Merle Flowers, Vice Chair

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Hank M. Bounds
State Superintendent of Education

December 10, 2007

Dr. Max K. Arinder, Executive Director
Joint Committee on Performance
Evaluation and Expenditure Review
Post Office Box 1204
Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1204

Dear Dr. Arinder and Members of the PEER Committee:

Attached you will find the Mississippi Department of Education's response to PEER's review of the State's dropout prevention program. I am writing to express my utter displeasure at the report and the manner in which it was carried out.

The report does not appropriately capture the good work completed in a relatively short time period by both the Department and school districts. During the course of the investigation, I experienced numerous events that lead me to question the motivation of the investigation and/or the ability of the investigators to conduct an unbiased review.

I cite the following as just a few examples to illustrate my concerns:

1. PEER states that they were unable to find any school official who was positive about MDE's training. A review of PEER's wording in their report shows a complete lack of objectivity. This, coupled with the data presented in Appendix F, certainly causes one to question the credibility of this portion of PEER's report.

2. In a communication, PEER staff requested that MDE comment on an alleged conversation about dropouts that took place five years ago in a legislative hearing. PEER could not or would not provide any additional information, such as the nature of the hearing or who the participants were, and thus no feedback was provided.

3. I met with the primary investigators on Thursday, October 25, 2007. During the meeting I asked investigators to explain the purpose of the review. Interestingly, the investigators' position on this topic changed at least two times during a 30-minute conversation.

4. PEER is negative about the Department's efforts to reduce dropouts. While PEER makes this allegation, professional educators and organizations nationally are applauding MDE's work. In fact, the Education Commission of the States has publicly stated that Mississippi is doing the most important work in the country on this issue. Further, Dr. Jay Smink, the director of the National Dropout Prevention Center, has guided all of the Department's work. Once again, it is interesting that PEER can arrive at these very negative conclusions while the most respected authorities in the country provide accounts that totally refute PEER's position.

5. PEER is negative in their report regarding the public relations campaign that is set to begin in January. When the investigators were apprised of the Department's ability to acquire more than $1.5 million in private funding for the purpose of building a public relations campaign, the response was "why did you wait so long." This statement by PEER is almost beyond belief and brings PEER's motives into question.
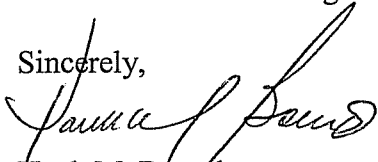
The fact is that MDE and most school districts have made significant progress in implementing the legislative requirements and intent in a relatively short time period. While PEER has been conducting this review for more than four months, the original timeline given to the Department allotted the Department only a few days to respond. After pleading our case, PEER reconsidered and extended the time period to respond to almost two weeks.

I contacted Dr. Arinder and voiced my concerns on October 25, 2007. Dr. Arinder assured me that he and his staff would meet with me prior to the submission of the final report to the PEER Committee. That has not occurred. Therefore, I am requesting that the PEER committee grant my request to appear before it prior to the public release of this particular report.

I certainly appreciate and value constructive criticism. Further, I believe it is both valuable and necessary if one is serious about improvement.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Hank M. Bounds
State Superintendent of Education

HMB/sw

Response to PEER Report: "A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program"

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has read the PEER report, *A Review of the Implementation of Mississippi's Public School Dropout Prevention Program*, and submits the following response to the report and the recommendations of PEER.

I.   The report does not accurately reflect the reality of the efforts of the MDE, Office of Dropout Prevention.   The Office of Dropout Prevention was created by legislation, MS Code §37-13-80.   This legislation includes the following components:

(1)   The creation of the Office of Dropout Prevention within the State Department of Education, with the responsibility of administering a statewide dropout prevention program and oversight of the Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement.

(2)   The appointment of a director for the Office of Dropout Prevention, who shall meet all qualifications established by the State Superintendent of Public Education and the State Personnel Board. The director's responsibilities include the proper administration of the Office of Dropout Prevention and any other regulations or policies that may be adopted by the State Board of Education. In addition, the director shall report to the Legislature on the activities and programs of the office by January 1 of each year beginning in 2009.

(3)   Each school district shall implement a dropout prevention program approved by the Office of Dropout Prevention of the State Department of Education by the 2008-2009 school year.

(4)   It is the intent of the Legislature that, through the statewide dropout prevention program and the dropout prevention programs implemented by each school district, the graduation rate for cohort classes will be increased to not less than eighty-five percent (85%) by the 2018-2019 school year. The Office of Dropout Prevention shall establish graduation rate benchmarks for each two-year period from the 2008-2009 school year through the 2018-2019 school year, which shall serve as guidelines for increasing the graduation rate for cohort classes on a systematic basis to eighty-five percent (85%) by the 2018-2019 school year.

The MDE, Office of Dropout Prevention has, to date, complied with each aspect of the MS Code §37-13-80. The Office of Dropout Prevention was created in September 2006, with oversight for the Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement, the Division of School Counseling and the Division of Alternative Education / GED Programs. Dr. Sheril Smith assumed the position of Director of the Office of Dropout Prevention on September 18, 2006. The State Plan for Dropout Prevention was adopted by the Mississippi Board of Education in February 2007. One major area of the state

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plan is the requirement for school districts to develop district-level dropout prevention plans in order to formalize the district-level program requirements of state law. As a part of this overall plan development, school districts were asked first to develop a dropout prevention team, comprised of school staff, representatives from the business community and general community organizations, as well as parents and students. Second, school districts were asked to develop a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the district-specific needs, taking into account a variety of perspectives, including parents, students, community members, teachers, principals and school administrators. Third, school districts were asked to use the information from the needs assessment to develop their overall dropout prevention plans. Written step-by step guidelines were provided to the districts by the Office of Dropout Prevention for each phase of the plan development following a pre-defined timeline. The step-by-step guidelines included the following documents: 1) Guidelines for the Development of Local Dropout Prevention Teams; 2) Guidelines for the Development of a Local District Needs Assessment; and 3) Guidelines for the Development of a Local Dropout Prevention Plan. (Please see Appendices A, B, and C).

The state plan also included the provision of three regional technical assistance training opportunities held in September, October and November of 2007 that provided training for school district personnel on both the development of a needs assessment as well as the overall district plan development. One hundred twenty-six districts (126) participated in these training sessions, with 468 individuals receiving training (Please see Appendix D for the list of districts that participated in these sessions). In addition to the formal technical assistance training opportunities, the Office of Dropout Prevention provided on-site technical assistance through the spring and summer of 2007 to various school districts requesting assistance. Forty-eight (48) school districts took advantage of this additional training. No school district was denied the opportunity of receiving this additional training (Please see Appendix E for a list of school districts that participated in these sessions and Appendix F for a summary of participant evaluations from the regional technical assistance training sessions).

It is important to note that the information on the number of school districts provided training and on-site technical assistance was only included in the PEER report after continual insistence by the MDE.

The 2007 state dropout prevention plan is still in its early implementation stage at both the state and school district levels. In accordance with the 2007 state plan and as required by state law, each school district will implement a dropout prevention program approved by the Office of Dropout Prevention by the 2008-2009 school year. The MDE is proud of the progress that has been made during the implementation phase. Once district dropout prevention plans are placed into action during school year 2008-2009, on-going evaluations of programs and initiatives will be completed by the MDE in an effort to meet the statutory goal of increasing the graduation rate to 85% by school year 2018-2019. In addition, the MDE, through its 2007 state dropout prevention plan is aggressively championing the additional goals of reducing the dropout rate and truancy rate by 50% by school year 2012-2013.

The review by PEER of the dropout prevention program has come during the early implementation stage of MS Code §37-13-80. In fact, the review comes prior to the 2008-2009 implementation benchmarks for district dropout prevention programs as noted in the governing statute. A review of the implementation of the dropout prevention program could have provided more meaningful measures, results, and feedback had it come at the culmination of the implementation stage rather than during the outset of the effort.

II.   It appears PEER was subjective in its selection of school districts interviewed and its assumptions presented in the report. The report indicates that PEER utilized a "purposive sample" to determine which school districts to interview. The report further indicates, "The purpose of the sample was to identify any problems with implementation of MDE's current dropout prevention program from the districts' perspective." By definition, a purposive sample is one that is selected subjectively. The purposive sampling method does not use random sampling, which makes it unacceptable for generalizing back to the population (Key, James P., Research Design in Occupational Education (1997), Oklahoma State University)

The MDE contends that the "purposive" selection of its school district sample demonstrates PEER's lack of objectivity. It appears that PEER through its purposive sampling sought to identify school districts with concerns about the implementation of MDE's current plan, rather than using a sample that would have provided a more balanced reflection of attitudes toward the process. PEER was unwilling to comment on the number of school districts interviewed, the names of those districts, the interview questions for the districts, or whether the districts interviewed actually attended any training sessions or requested technical assistance from the Office of Dropout Prevention.

III.   The PEER report focuses on the similarities between the 2004 and 2007 plan, rather than noting the significant enhancements of the 2007 plan over the 2004 plan. The four major differences between the 2007 state plan and the 2004 state plan are as follows:

1)   Overarching Goals – The state goals of the 2007 dropout prevention plan are as follows:

1) Increase the graduation rate to 85% by 2018-2019 (legislative goal/ requirement);
2) Reduce the dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013 (MDE goal); and
3) Reduce the truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013 (MDE goal).

These overarching goals strengthen the statewide dropout prevention effort by including quantitative benchmarks and timelines to ensure progress can be properly measured. The four main goals of the 2004 plan did not include any such benchmarks and/or timelines.

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2) Implementation Goals – In making its case about similarities between the goals of the 2004 and 2007 dropout prevention plans, PEER made comparisons between the nine departmental goals contained in the 2004 state plan and portions of the Superintendent's Strategies for Improving Education in Mississippi contained in the 2007 state plan. (The Superintendent's Strategies were included as the introduction to the appendix on state initiatives supporting dropout prevention in the 2007 plan.) However, for purposes of drawing conclusions on the similarities between the goals of the two dropout prevention plans, the comparison should have been made between the 2004 plan goals and the 2007 implementation goals.

The nine implementation goals of the 2007 plan are tied to specific timelines that have helped to keep the progression of the state's dropout prevention initiative on track. These goals are mainly results-oriented, as opposed to the mainly process-oriented goals of the 2004 plan. The 2007 goals are much more comprehensive in nature and provide additional specificity on the timeline for implementation, by providing benchmark dates for various stages of the process. These additions are considered to be important enhancements over the 2004 plan.

3) Guidelines – Three sets of guidelines have been developed that provide school districts with the technical assistance needed to properly develop their plans. These guidelines address the following areas: 1) Guidelines for the Development of Local Dropout Prevention Teams; 2) Guidelines for the Development of a Local District Needs Assessment; and 3) Guidelines for the Development of a Local Dropout Prevention Plan. The 2004 dropout prevention plan did include requirements for a position akin to a dropout coordinator/team leader and a review of existing dropout prevention policies. However, through the above-mentioned guidelines, the 2007 plan provides a systematic process for the development of these components and includes them as integral parts to the overall development of district-level plans.

4) Evaluation – The 2007 state plan provides for the evaluation of local dropout prevention plans. The Office of Dropout Prevention will work with the Southeastern Development Laboratory (SEDL) on the development of an evaluation rubric for the draft versions of the school district plans that are due in the spring of 2008. SEDL will also provide training for graduation coaches, who will be responsible for the review and feedback portion of the evaluation. The graduation coaches are part of the Gear Up program administered by the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). This training is all provided at no cost to the MDE. The 2004 plan did not have an evaluation component.

Additionally, the PEER report states, "Districts are being asked to complete the same work that was done in 2004, creating confusion and dissatisfaction within the districts". PEER has been unwilling to discuss which specific school districts had concerns.

However, this issue was not once raised from the 48 school districts that received on-site training and the 126 districts that participated in the three regional technical assistance training opportunities held from September through November of 2007.

The PEER report further states, "Valuable time has been used to create new plans that could have been better spent evaluating programs to ensure there is a positive effect on the dropout and graduation rates." The MDE disagrees with this suggestion and considers it to be subjective. Based on the new legislative requirements and efforts to refocus attention on the dropout issue, it was considered necessary to move in a direction that would provide needed enhancements to the state-wide dropout prevention program, while focusing on district-wide implementation and sustainability. The creation of the 2007 state dropout prevention plan was considered vital to this endeavor.

IV. The PEER report demonstrates a lack of understanding of the purpose of the Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign. The report states, "The new state plan encompasses seven critical components 'to be implemented at the state and local levels'. Of those seven components, the public relations dropout prevention awareness campaign has not yet been completed by MDE, despite the recommendation of the department's own consultant to initiate a 'kickoff campaign' in September 2006 at the beginning of the state's new dropout prevention effort."

It appears that PEER does not fully understand the concept of the Public Relations Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign. The public awareness campaign will constitute a multi-year effort and include the dissemination of information on the importance of completing high school on many fronts and in various formats. It is the hope of the MDE that the public awareness campaign will make a difference in changing societal attitudes about the importance of staying in school.

The "kickoff", which was recommended by the department's consultant and mentioned by PEER, actually was completed on November 1, 2006 in conjunction with the release of the new state plan. Assembled at the event were members of the dropout prevention task force, including representatives of community organizations, faith-based organizations, members of the business community, parent advocacy groups, as well as representatives from school districts and MDE. The department's consultant was present at the event and provided a presentation. The event attracted both newspaper and television coverage. This kickoff event was an initial piece of the overall public awareness campaign.

Further events to focus attention on the dropout prevention effort will include a MDE-sponsored Teen Summit in January 2008, which will bring together students to discuss ways to dramatically improve graduation rates and serve as a launch for student-led local dropout prevention efforts. Also, in February 2008, the MDE will sponsor an Adult Graduation Summit. The event will involve policymakers and dynamic national speakers to provide a better understanding of specific intervention strategies that motivate students to stay in school. Leaders from organizations across the state, including the business community, service organizations, faith-based groups, economic development

organizations, and state and local elected officials will come together to learn about our students' recommendations from the Teen Summit.

In absence of state dollars provided for the public awareness campaign, the MDE sought out private sponsorship for the effort, to include a media advertising campaign. As noted in the report, the MDE has recently secured $1.5 million from a private source for the public awareness campaign. We are thankful that we have been able to secure these resources and are excited that private entities are willing to assist so generously with MDE's dropout prevention program. The MDE will continue to seek additional private dollars to assist with this critical component of the dropout prevention effort.

The PEER report also states, "As a result of beginning a media campaign after the new cohort data was released...districts are being scrutinized by their communities for a reduction in the district graduation rate that is a result of a new method of calculating the rates based on a four-year cohort." In order to clarify any issues regarding the differences in graduation rates, the MDE has continued to communicate information on the calculation of the graduation, dropout and completion rates. During a meeting held at the MDE on October 4, 2006, school district superintendents received initial graduation, dropout and completion rate information based on the 4-year cohort analysis process. Follow-up communication was provided to districts to ensure an understanding of the calculation process for the 4-year cohort, as well as the distinction between the 4-year cohort data and the graduation rates used for reporting purposes for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Technical assistance has also been provided to districts when additional clarification has been requested.

V. Response to PEER Recommendations:

The PEER report provides the following recommendations for the MDE, Office of Dropout Prevention:

a) **PEER Recommendation:** "The Office of Dropout Prevention should evaluate the state's current dropout prevention programs to determine whether they conform to best practices."

MDE Response: Prior to this recommendation the MDE had already incorporated the evaluation of current dropout prevention programs into the evaluation process of the new district dropout prevention plans. The 2007 state plan incorporates an evaluation component upon submission of district plans to the MDE. School districts will receive feedback on the draft version of their plans. Annual evaluations will be conducted following implementation of the district plans. Districts have been asked to incorporate into their plans those current initiatives that have been found to be successful. Conformity with best practices of current initiatives included in new district plans will be considered during the evaluation process once draft plans have been submitted to the MDE.

b)   **PEER Recommendation:** "The Office of Dropout Prevention should provide the districts with cost and cost-effectiveness data on the fifty exemplary programs identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network."

MDE Response: The Office of Dropout Prevention will provide as much cost information to the school districts as is available to assist districts with their efforts. However, it is important to note that this information will be provided for informational purposes only. A school district will have the option to adopt full programs, or portions of programs based on district need and availability of funds.

c)   **PEER Recommendation:** "The Office of Dropout Prevention should focus on the school districts with the highest dropout rates in the state and provide assistance in implementing new dropout prevention programs that conform to best practices and evaluating current measures in place."

MDE Response: While each school district is required to submit and implement a district-level dropout prevention plan, particular attention will be paid to districts with the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates. This step had already been considered by the MDE and will be an important part of the implementation efforts.

d)   **PEER Recommendation:** "The Office of Dropout Prevention should immediately draft criteria for evaluating the district dropout prevention plans to aid the districts in understanding what is expected in the plans that are due beginning in February 2008."

MDE Response: As stated previously, the 2007 state plan provides for the evaluation of local dropout prevention plans. The Office of Dropout Prevention will work with the Southeastern Development Laboratory (SEDL) on the development of an evaluation rubric for the draft versions of the school district plans that are due in the spring of 2008. SEDL will also provide training for our partners, the Gear Up program graduation coaches, who will be responsible for the review and feedback portion of the evaluation. This training is all provided at no cost to the MDE. The 2004 plan did not have an evaluation component.

The report by PEER also provides recommendations to the legislature to expand the legislative reporting requirements of MS Code § 37-13-80. While the recommendations are not directed specifically toward the MDE, the MDE will certainly comply with any increased reporting requirements that the legislature deems appropriate in furthering the effort to prevent the children of Mississippi from dropping out of school.

Appendix A - Guidelines for the Development of Local District Dropout Prevention Teams
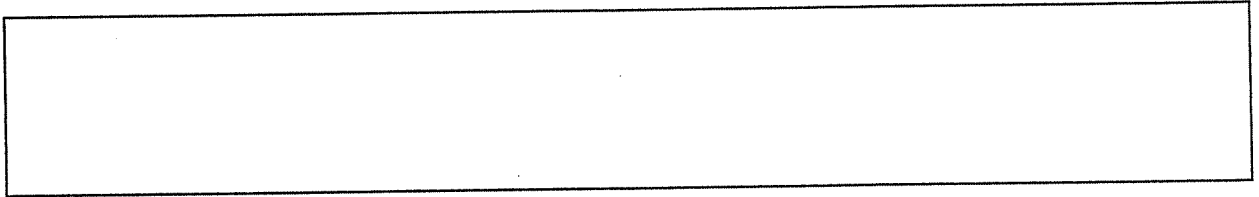
Part I:

Guidelines for the Development of
Local Dropout Prevention Teams

&

Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention

Dropout Prevention in Mississippi:

Developing Educational

Partnerships for Academic

Success!

Purpose

The draft version of the Mississippi Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan was presented to the Dropout Prevention Taskforce on November 1, 2006. The plan details current state-level initiatives in dropout prevention, presents timelines for six implementation goals, and sets forth seven additional critical components for future implementation. Using the 15 Strategies for Dropout Prevention (from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network) as the conceptual framework, the various initiatives listed in the plan seek to accomplish three overarching goals:

1. Increase the graduation rate for cohort classes on a systematic basis to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year, as mandated by Mississippi Code §37-13-80;
2. Reduce the dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013; and
3. Reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013.

Implementation Goals

Implementation Goal I in the state plan indicates that the Mississippi Department of Education will provide comparative data on Mississippi's grade 9-12 cohort dropout rate and grade 7-12 cohort dropout rate, according to the following timeline:

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2001-2002

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2002-2003

- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2003-2004

- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 6-year (7-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with seventh grade students in 2001-2002

During the November 2006 board meeting of the State Board of Education, state and district level graduation and dropout rates were presented. The data were then approved in the December board meeting. According to the timeline above, additional data will be forthcoming in April 2007.
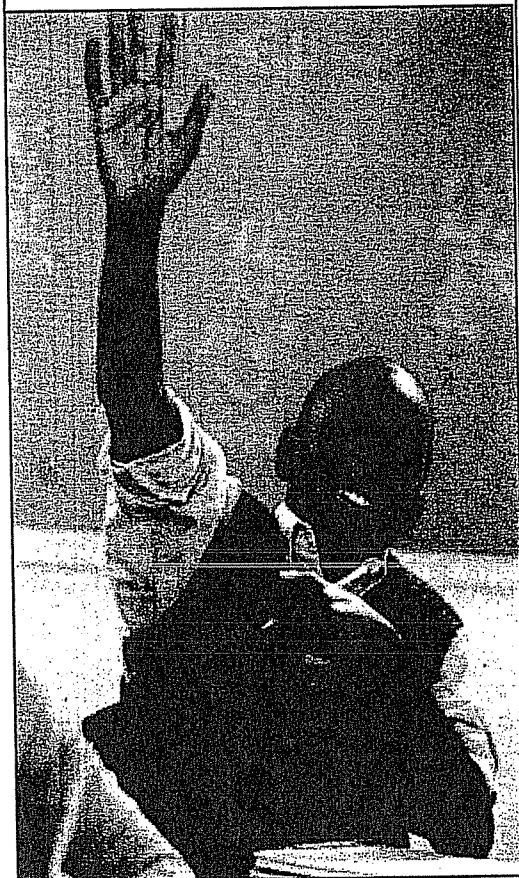
In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal II** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan, it is the purpose of this document to
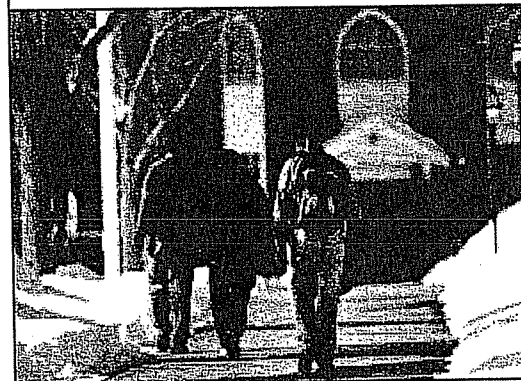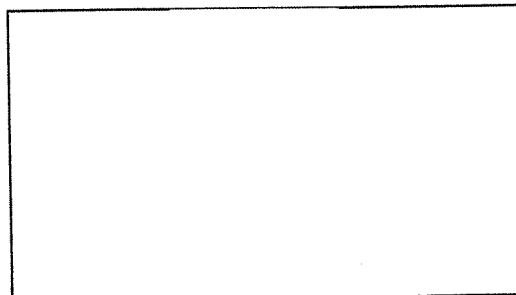
present the formal request to districts for the submission of names and areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Local Dropout Prevention Team.

Future Reports

Future reports from the Office of Dropout Prevention will fulfill the requirements of **Implementation Goals IV through VII**, which are listed below:

- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities will be available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment.

- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Plan (LDP) for Dropout Prevention. The district framework will include model implementation timelines, regional training schedules and required deliverables for Local Dropout Prevention Team meetings. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).

- During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans. Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:
  - September - Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
  - October - Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
  - November - Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts

- Local districts should submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule
  - Northern School Districts - February 1, 2008
  - Central School Districts - March 3, 2008
  - Southern School Districts - April 1, 2008

- Local school boards should adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.

- Local plans should be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.

In addition to providing guidelines for implementation, the reports will also present information on current national and state level research and initiatives. The information will aid school districts and stakeholders in making research-based and data-driven decisions while developing the dropout prevention plans. Refer to pages 9-16, **Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention, for this information** It is the hope of the Office of Dropout Prevention that this work will prove useful in allowing school districts and stakeholders to make research-based and data-driven decisions in the work of dropout prevention.

The following sections of this booklet set forth the guidelines for the development of Local Dropout Prevention Team.

Guidelines for the Development of Local Dropout Prevention Team

Implementation Goal II of the State Dropout Prevention plan requires local districts to submit to the MDE by April 2, 2007 a list of areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Dropout Prevention Team. The following guidelines will assist local districts with the development of their Local Dropout Prevention Team.

1. Who should be on the Local Dropout Prevention Team?

The Local Dropout Prevention Team should be established by the local school district and should be composed of ten to fifteen members who represent the following groups:

Local Civic/Governmental Agency Representatives
Mayor/Councilman/Alderman
Judge/Court Administrator
Government Agency (i.e., DHS, RESA, etc.)
Community and Junior College
College/University
Law Enforcement
Juvenile Justice System

Local Community Representatives
Parents
Business Partners
Local Chamber of Commerce
Faith-Based Organization
Other County/Community Agency (i.e., grassroots advocacy group)
Students
School Board Members

School-Related Staff
Superintendent
Alternative Education Representative
Principals (elementary, middle, and high school)
Special Education Director
School Counselors
School Social Worker
School Health Council Member
Lead Teacher (elementary, middle, and high school)
MSIS / Attendance Coordinator

At a minimum, the Local Dropout Prevention Team should include at least three representatives from each of the groups above. It is strongly recommended that Local Dropout Prevention Teams include at least one MDE School Attendance Officer

Dropout Prevention Teams

Civic/Governmental Agencies

School Staff

Local Community

MDE Office of Dropout Prevention
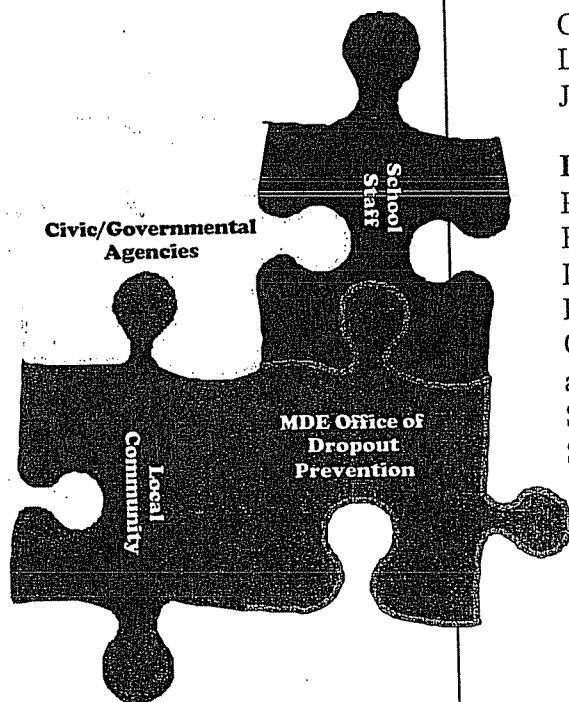
(SAO). The SAO will fulfill the role of the MDE representative on the Dropout Prevention Team.

2. Who selects the members of the Local Dropout Prevention Team?

The selection of Local Dropout Prevention Team members should be the responsibility of the local school Superintendent. The Superintendent, however, should make every effort to ensure equitable representation from each of the three suggested groups (civic/governmental agency representatives, community representatives, and school staff) in order to develop strong partnerships and provide a broad foundation for the work of dropout prevention.

3. Who should lead the Local Dropout Prevention Team?

Ideally, the Local Dropout Prevention Team should be led by the school district Superintendent. However, the Superintendent may, at his or her discretion, designate a representative to lead the Team.

4. What are the responsibilities of the Local Dropout Prevention Team Leader?

The Dropout Prevention Team Leader will be responsible for the following areas:

- Convening meetings of the Team,
- Serving as the local district's main point of contact with the MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention,
- Communicating to the Team information and guidance he or she has received from the Office of Dropout Prevention, and
- Facilitating the selection and implementation of dropout prevention strategies.

5. What other roles should be assumed on the Dropout Prevention Team?

Other roles for the Dropout Prevention Team may include these:

Team Sponsor—Possibly a member of the local business community, this individual provides support by sponsoring activities such as award ceremonies and certificates of achievement. The Team Sponsor may also provide resources such as access to copy/fax machines or other equipment.

Team Parent—A parent of a child in the school district, this individual should be selected to encourage and recruit other parents and associates to the Team to help take ownership of the team from a parental perspective, enabling increased parental involvement.

Team Associate—A community representative that exhibits an 'expert' or unique perspective to add to the Team efforts. The Team Associate should be willing to support the Team in such areas as obtaining /researching community programs and resources, and possibly donating time to fundraising for the district.

6. What will be the ongoing responsibilities of the Local Dropout Prevention Team?

The Local Dropout Prevention Team will be responsible for implementing the following goals:

Identifying
- Data-based Indicators that may contribute to a student's decision to drop out of school
- Resources to aid in the development of the district needs assessment
- Resources for training educators in addressing various issues associated with at-risk students

Developing
- A plan that incorporates support programs for at-risk students
- Policy statements regarding district-level dropout prevention strategies
- A plan for the partnership between school officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school
- Plans that incorporate parent training to provide strategies for motivating their children to stay in school
- Plans for transitioning students from Juvenile Detention Centers back to the local educational system.

Implementing
- District dropout prevention plans
- Staff development training that incorporates instructional strategies for student motivation and participation in learning

When local school districts have selected the members of their Local Dropout Prevention Team, please submit the areas of responsibility to Mrs. Paulette Brinson, Project Officer, Office of Dropout Prevention via fax to (601) 576-3504.

Please *do not* mail submissions.
Once received, Dropout Prevention Team information will be posted to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention website.

Local Dropout Prevention Team Members

School District: _____   Telephone #: _____

Mailing Address: _____   Fax #: _____

_____

<table>
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E-mail address for
Superintendent/Team Leader: _____

	Civic/ Gov't. Agency Rep.	Community Rep.	School Staff
_____ Superintendent (please print) — (signature)	___	___	___
_____ Team Leader (please print) — (signature)	___	___	___
_____ Team Sponsor (please print) — (signature)	___	___	___
_____ Team Parent (please print) — (signature)	___	___	___
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Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention

National Research

Thirty years ago, most teenagers who dropped out of high school could still expect to find a well-paying job. Further, given the work ethic of the time, the common practice was that most people who worked hard could expect to climb the economic ladder and eventually live a comfortable, middle-class life. This notion, however, has drastically changed. Today, high school dropouts face a double-dose of diminishing opportunities and a lifetime of financial struggle. National data demonstrates that the median earnings of families headed by a high school dropout declined by nearly a third between 1974 and 2004.

The recently released report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) presents the following findings:

- Approximately 5 out of every 100 students enrolled in high school in October 2003 left school before October 2004 without completing a high school program.

- Hispanic students were the most likely to drop out in 2004 (8.9 percent), followed by black students (5.7 percent), white students (3.7 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (1.2 percent).

- In 2004 the dropout rate for students living in low-income families was approximately four times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (10.4 percent versus 2.5 percent).

- Students who pursue a high school education past the typical high school age are at higher risk than others of becoming a dropout.

Mississippi's Perspective

A recent report from the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) presents what it perceives as Mississippi's dire situation. The report states that "twenty-seven percent of Mississippi adults had no high school diploma in 2000." Data from 2004 places Mississippi 48th in the nation in terms of degree attainment – approximately twenty percent of Mississippi adults have at least a bachelor's degree. Further, it appears that a contributing factor to the low degree attainment rate is what can be considered a "brain drain" – from 1990 to 2000 the state lost approximately 5,000 adults with college degrees and gained approximately 10,000 adults with less than a high school education within the same time period.
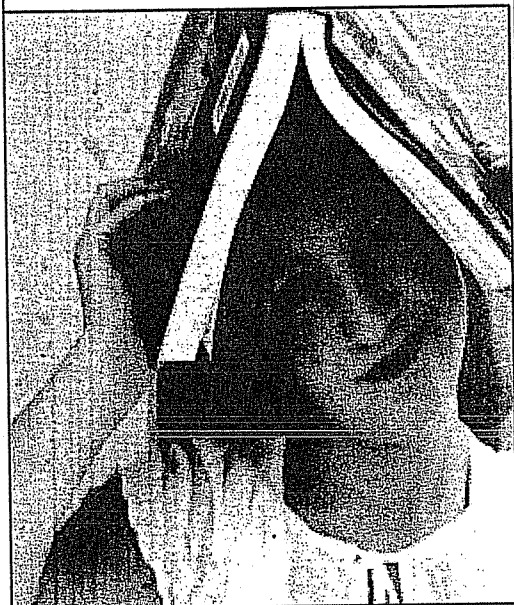
The Mississippi Department of Education looks at a number of elements in determining the status of education quality in the state. As shown in Figure 1, 2005-06 school enrollment rates in Mississippi are fairly consistent from first grade through eighth grade (peaking in the first and seventh grades), with an average enrollment of 38,500 students. However, enrollment rates begin to decline after the ninth grade, from 41,146 students in ninth grade to 26,205 students in twelfth grade.

Figure 1:
Enrollment by Grade

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics
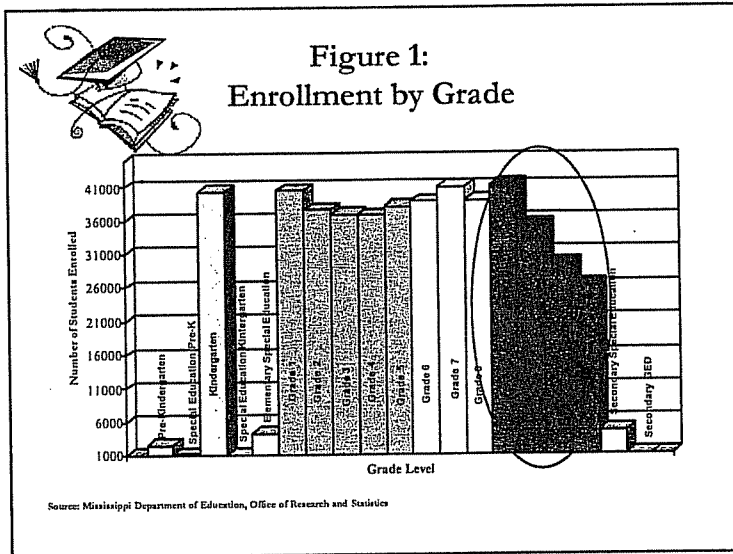
As shown in Figure 2, black students comprise 36.4% of the statewide population and 51.5% of the public school population. Conversely, 60.7% of the Mississippi population is white, while 46.5% of the public school population is white.

Figure 2:
Race/Ethnicity

Hispanic 1.7% Native American 0.5%
Asian 0.7%

Statewide Data
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Hispanic 1.0% Native American 0.0%
Asian 1.0%

Public School Enrollment
Source: MDE Office of Research and Statistics
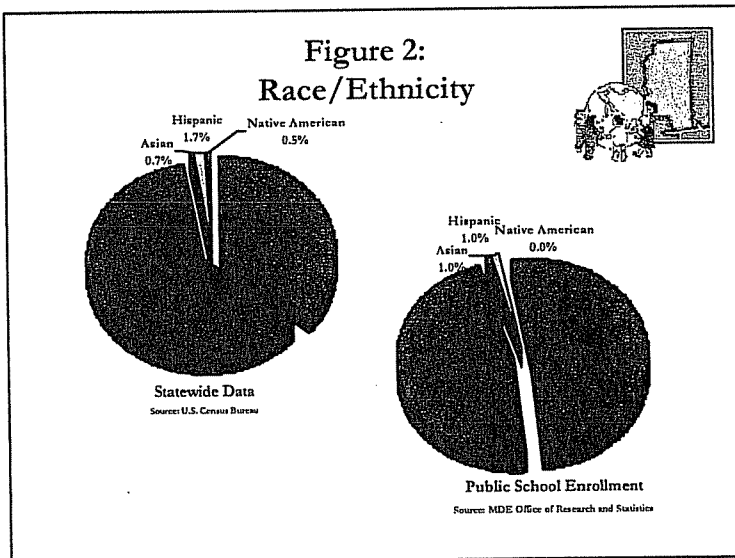
According to the National Governor's Association (NGA), the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. For these reasons, the NGA considers the achievement gap, "one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face." In Mississippi, the achievement gap between black and white students, and between economically disadvantaged versus economically advantaged students persist. Results of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) for school year 2005/2006 demonstrate three issues of concern for all areas of the MCT:

- In each academic area (reading, language arts, and mathematics), achievement decreases after middle school.

- The achievement gap between white and black students continues to grow throughout students' academic careers and persists across academic areas.

- Similar achievement gaps exist between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students.

Figures 3 and 4 present the following results for **MCT Reading**:

- Figure 3 shows that between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 4 percentage point decrease in student scoring proficient or above. However, between grades 5 and 8, there was a 29 per-

Figure 3:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Reading
Race/Ethnicity

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics
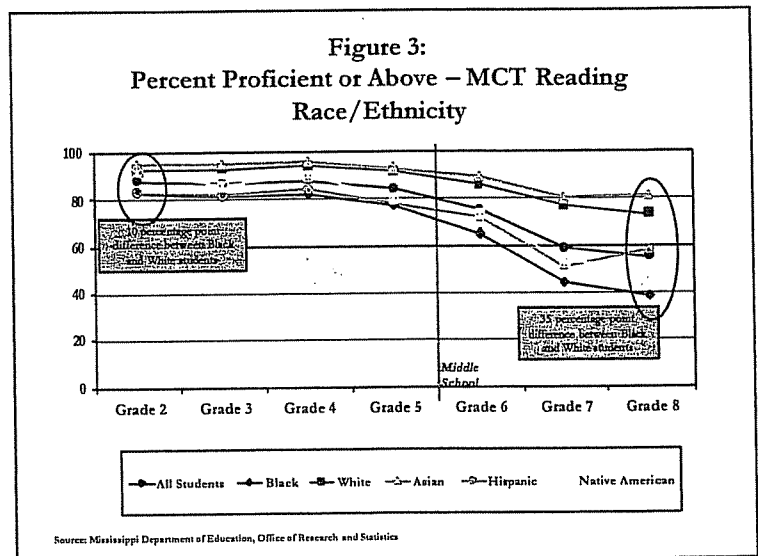
centage point decrease. These declines result in an overall 33 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.

- In terms of ethic group differences, there was an initial 10 percentage point difference between black and white students.

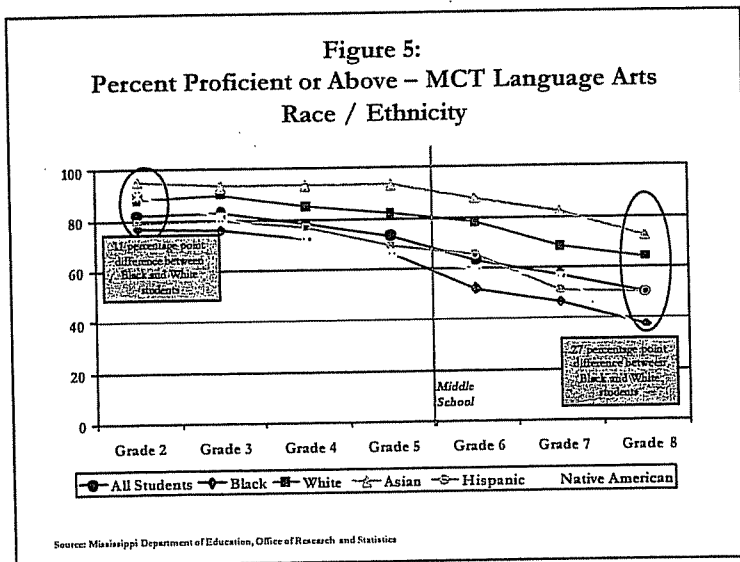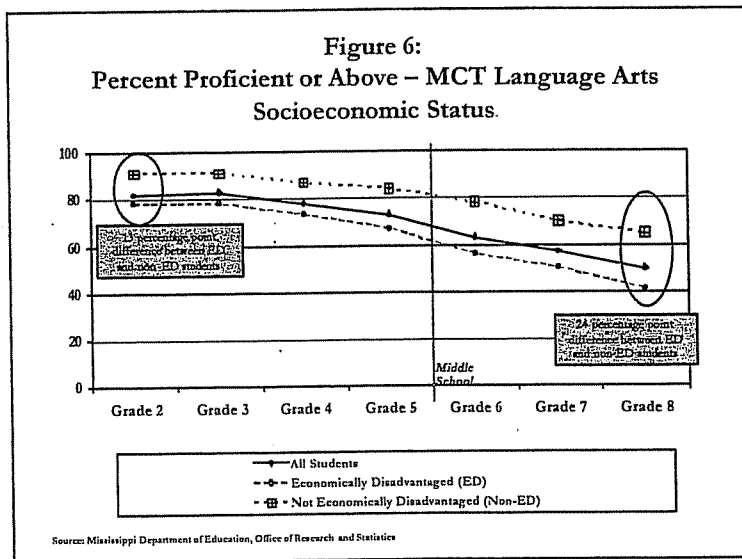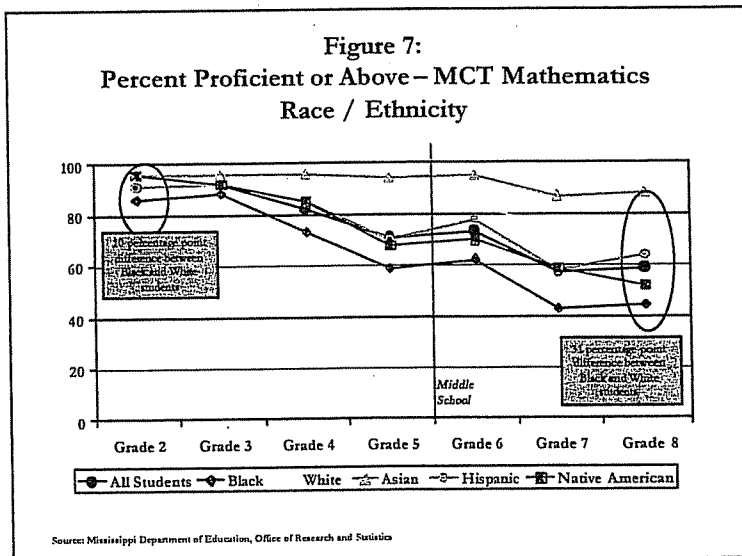However, by eighth grade, the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 35 percentage points.

- Figure 4 shows an initial 10 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade the difference between socio-economic

Figure 4:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Reading
Socioeconomic Status
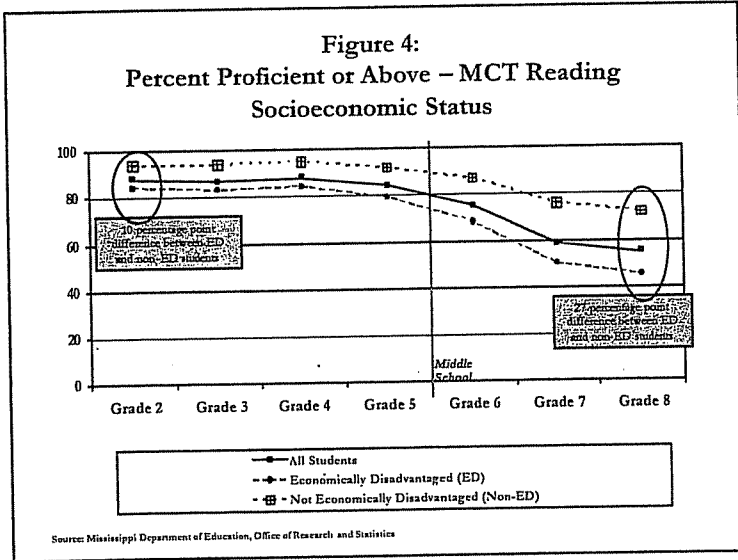
status (SES) groups had increased to 27 percentage points.

Figures 5 and 6 present similar results for **MCT Language Arts**:

- Figure 5 shows that between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 9 percentage point decrease in students' scoring proficient or above. However, between grade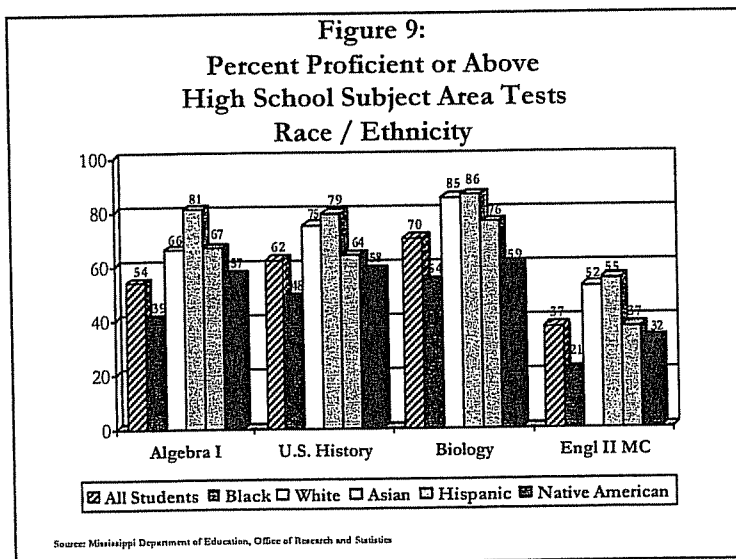s 5 and 8, there was a 23 percentage point decrease. These declines result in an overall 32 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.

Figure 5:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Language Arts
Race / Ethnicity

Eighty-two percent of U.S. college students say they would have worked harder if they had been more challenged in high school.

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Internationally, American 8th graders rank 17th in reading, 27th in mathematics, and 20th in science.

- In terms of ethnic group differences, there was an initial 11 percentage point difference between black and white students. However, by eighth grade the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 27 percentage points.

- Figure 6 below shows an initial 10 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade, the difference between SES groups

Figure 6:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Language Arts
Socioeconomic Status.

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

had increased to 27 percentage points.

The most positive results are evidenced for **MCT Mathematics**, presented in Figures 7 and 8 below:

- Between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 9 percentage point decrease in students' scoring proficient or above. However, between grades 5 and 8, there was a 23 percentage point decrease.

Figure 7:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Mathematics
Race / Ethnicity

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

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These declines result in an overall 32 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.

- In terms of ethnic group differences, there was an initial 10 percentage point difference between black and white students. However, by eighth grade the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 31 percentage points.

- In terms of differences in socioeconomic status (SES) for math, Figure 8 below shows an initial 8 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade the difference between SES groups had increased to 24 percentage points.

Figure 8:
Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Mathematics
Socioeconomic Status

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics
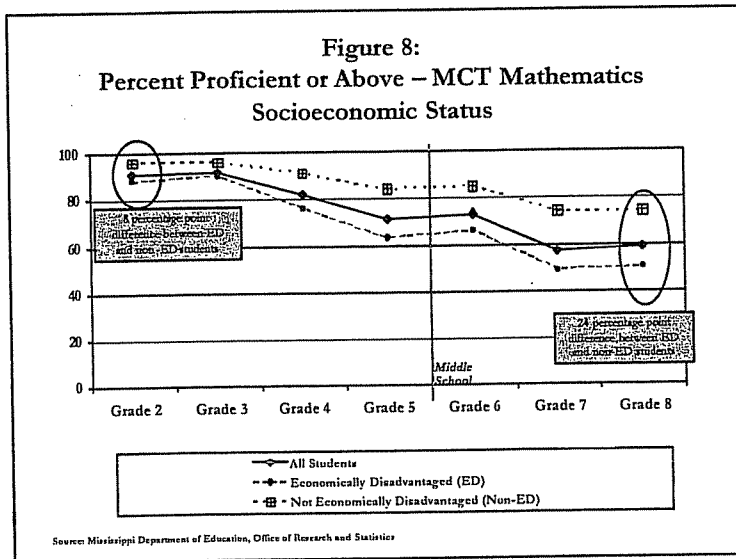
Nationally, only 2 in 10 whites and 1 in 10 African Americans and Hispanics will earn a two- or four-year COLLEGE DEGREE by their mid-20s.

Ethnic and SES differences are similarly apparent in the results of the high school Subject Area Testing Program (SATP). Figure 9 shows

Figure 9:
Percent Proficient or Above
High School Subject Area Tests
Race / Ethnicity

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

On average, a HIGH SCHOOL graduate saves society $41,000 in Medicaid costs and $25,000 in prison costs.

On average, a COLLEGE graduate saves society $71,000 in Medicaid costs and $34,000 in prison costs.

that in each area of the SATP — Algebra I, U.S. History, Biology, and English II MC — black students scored consistently lower than other ethnic groups.

Additionally, Figure 10 shows that in terms of SES, economically disadvantaged students scored lower in each area of the SATP, with the lowest overall scores being in the English II MC area.

Figure 10:
Percent Proficient or Above
High School Subject Area Tests
Socioeconomic Status

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

Dropout / Graduation Data for Mississippi

Recently released data on the 2001-2002 4-year cohort group of students reveals a 61.1% graduation rate and a 26.6% dropout rate for the state of Mississippi. (For further information on the calculation of Mississippi's graduation and dropout rates, please see http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/ORS/RPTS.htm, "Procedures for Calculating Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Counts and Rates." As previously stated, the first set of comparative data will be available in April 2007. Thus, in future years the MDE will be able to present rate changes over time.

When dropout and graduation data are disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity, the resulting information presents a slightly different perspective for the state.

As shown in Figure 11, a 10.4 percentage point difference exists between the dropout rates for males and females (31.5% versus 21.1%, respectively). In addition, an approximate 16 percentage point difference exists between the graduation rates for males and females (53.6% and 69.5%, respectively).
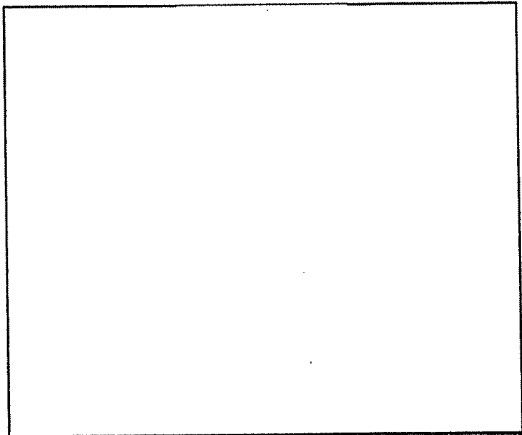
Figure 11:
Dropout / Graduation Data by Gender

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

On average, a HIGH SCHOOL graduate earns $600,000 more during his/her lifetime than a dropout.
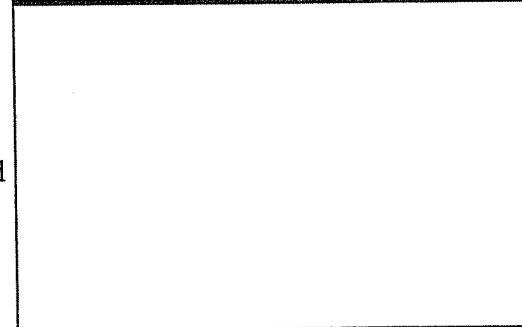
An additional layer of analysis is presented in Figure 12, below. When dropout and graduation data are disaggregated by both gender and ethnicity, the data show that black males have both the highest dropout rate (35.8%) and the lowest graduation rate (53.9%). Conversely, white females were shown to have the lowest dropout rate (18.1%) and the highest graduation rate (79.4%). Thus, while previously there was a 10.4 percentage point difference between males and females, Figure 12 shows a 17.7 percentage point difference in dropout rates between white females and black males and a 25.5 percentage point difference in terms of graduation rates.

Figure 12:
Dropout / Graduation Data by Gender & Race

Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

On average, a COLLEGE GRADUATE earns $1.4 million more during his/her lifetime than a high school dropout.
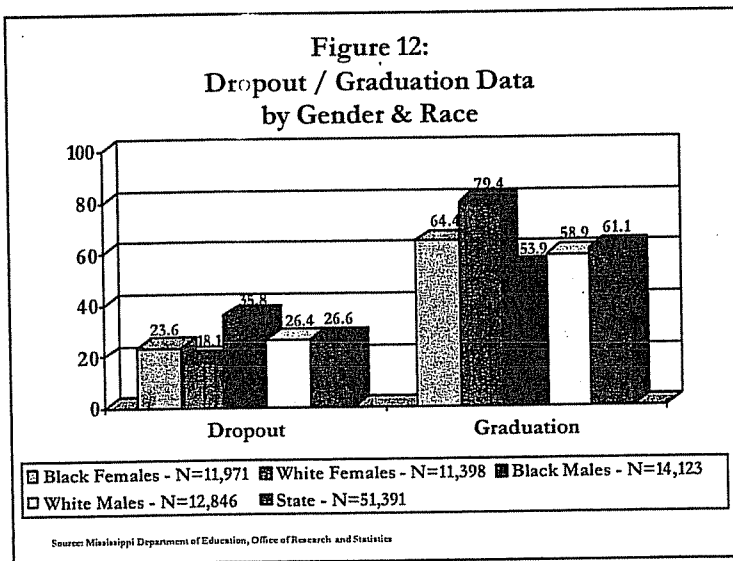
Each of the previous data points helps to set the context for the need for the development of Local Dropout Prevention Team and the creation of Local Dropout Prevention Needs Assessment. District-level information will be made available to local school districts from the Office of Dropout Prevention upon request.
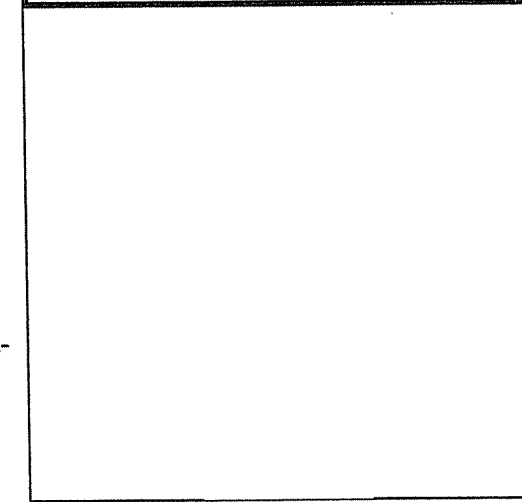
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Compulsory School Attendance
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Appendix B – Guidelines for the Development of a Local District Needs Assessment

Part II:

Guidelines for the Development of a
Local District Needs Assessment

Dropout Prevention in Mississippi:

Developing Educational

Partnerships for Academic

Success!

Hank Bounds, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Education

J. Martez Hill, MPP
Deputy State Superintendent

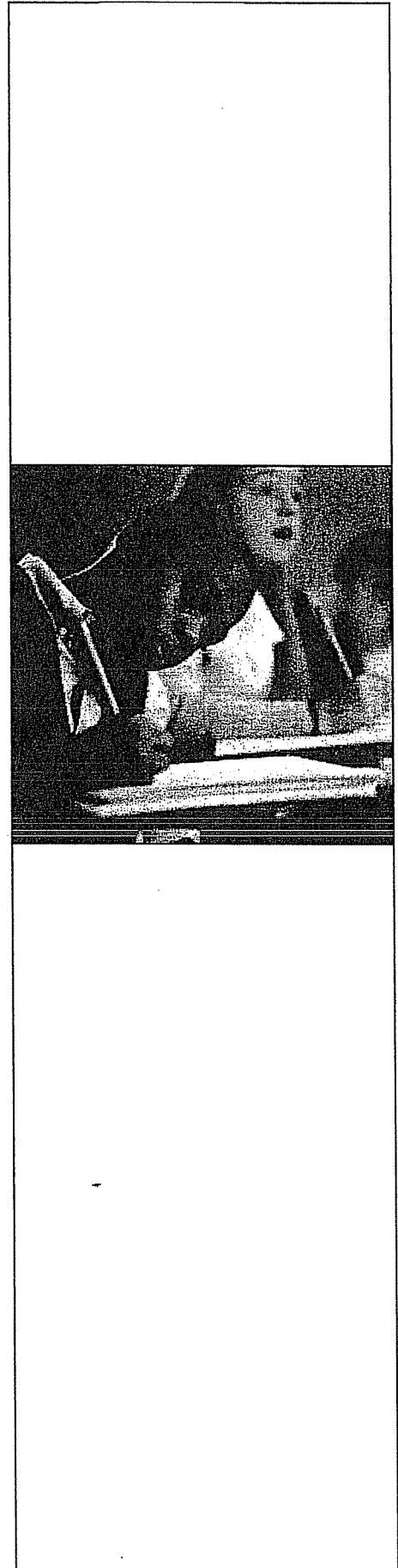**Sheril R. Smith, Ph.D.**
Director, Office of Dropout Prevention

Guidelines for the Development of a
Local District Needs Assessment

In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal III** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan, this document provides guidelines to local school districts on how to develop a dropout prevention needs assessment.

Future Reports

Future reports from the Office of Dropout Prevention will fulfill the requirements of **Implementation Goals IV through VI**, which are listed below:

- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities will be available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment.

- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Plan (LDP) for Dropout Prevention. The district framework will include model implementation timelines, regional training schedules and required deliverables for Local Dropout Prevention Team meetings. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).

- During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans. Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:
  - September - Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
  - October - Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
  - November - Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts

- Local districts shall submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule
  - Northern School Districts - February 1, 2008
  - Central School Districts - March 3, 2008
- Southern School Districts - April 1, 2008

- Local school boards shall adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.

- Local plans shall be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.

In addition to providing guidelines for implementation, these reports will also present information on current national and state level research and initiatives. It is the hope of the Office of Dropout Prevention that this work will prove useful in allowing school districts and stake-holders to make research-based and data-driven decisions in the work of dropout prevention.

Implementation Goal III of the State Dropout Prevention plan requires the MDE to make available to local districts the guide-lines for a dropout prevention needs assessment. There are a wide variety of needs assessment tools available for use. How-ever, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention has adopted a speci-fied format for district needs assessments. While it is not manda-tory for school districts to utilize each form included here, dis-tricts will be required to adequately address each of the four areas listed below.

Staff members from the Office of Dropout Prevention will be available to provide technical assistance to districts in the development of their needs assessment.

District Dropout Prevention Teams are asked to develop a systematic set of procedures to 1) determine needs of students at risk of dropping out and recent re-enrollees from the juvenile justice system; 2) examine the nature and causes of dropping out; and 3) set priorities for future action. In addressing these tasks, local districts should address each of the fol-lowing four areas in their needs assessments:

1. Identify the current needs within the school related to dropout prevention (specific populations, behaviors, curricular, monetary, etc.).

2. Prioritize the current needs.

3. Identify existing school and community resources.

4. Specify gaps between existing resources and existing prioritized needs.

Districts may opt to contract with external agencies for the completion of this needs assessment.

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Addressing Needs Assessment Area #1—Identify the needs within the school related to dropout prevention.

This area of the needs assessment will require the greatest amount of time and input on the part of the Local Dropout Prevention Team. There are several ways local teams may attempt to collect the data necessary to address this area. Appendix B of the State Dropout Prevention Plan presents relevant graduation and dropout data for each school district. Local Dropout Prevention Teams should utilize these data as a beginning point for their needs assessments.

While school-level graduation and/or dropout data are not currently available, Dropout Prevention Teams in districts with multiple feeder patterns should place focused attention on feeders having the greatest need. These feeders, or particular schools within the feeders may be designated as "high-risk."

Once particular high-risk feeders and/or schools have been identified, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should attempt to identify particular students within the district who may be at greatest risk for dropping out. Methods of identifying particular students may vary; however, based on current research, the list of variables below are those most often suggested as predictors of dropping out of school. They include the following:

- Attendance
- Truancy
- Grade point average
- Achievement data
- Number of grade retentions
- Number of discipline referrals
- Educational level of parents
- Special program placements
- Number of school transfers
- Ethnic/gender distinctions
- Number of suspensions
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Pregnancy/teen parent
- Number of counseling referrals
- Time spent at a juvenile detention center
- Family status (family size, single-parent family)
- Reading and math scores (elementary and middle school)
- Participation in free/reduced lunch program

These predictive indicators are not listed in any particular order of priority, and school districts may have identified additional indicators of particular relevance to the specific district. Student data related to each of the indicators should be accessible at the local district level. Local Teams should allow this list to guide the identification of students at-risk of dropping out. Depending on the population of the district, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should determine the number/percentage of

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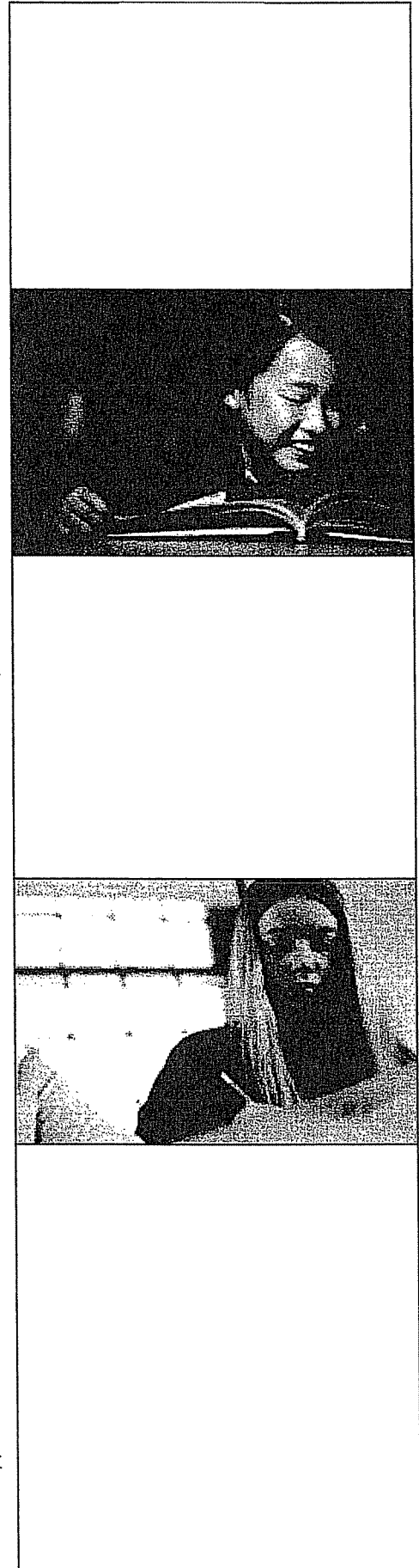
indicators a student must meet to be highlighted for early intervention. As a targeted population, this group should comprise approximately ten percent (10%) of the district student population.

After particular feeders/schools and students have been identified, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should begin to collect perception data from various stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, and business/community partners. This data may be collected through face-to-face individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, or any combination of forms. The method of data collection will depend on factors such as time, group dynamics, and accessibility. The attached forms (Resources—pages 6-10) may be adapted for different data collection methods.

In determining the sample to survey, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should attempt to get adequate representation from all partners, including principals, teachers, school staff, parents, students, and community/business partners. Teams should also ensure that extra sampling emphasis is placed on the feeder/school and students identified as having the greatest need.

Addressing Needs Assessment Area #2—Prioritize the current needs. Based on the information collected through the school and student data as well as the perception data, Local Dropout Prevention Teams may then begin the process of prioritizing the current needs of the school district. The prioritized lists should include a ranking of schools, student groups, school culture issues, and particular student behaviors that will need to be addressed in the eventual local dropout prevention plan.

**Addressing Needs Assessment Area #3—Identify existing school and community resources.**
The list of prioritized needs should then be matched against a listing of programs and initiatives already in place within the school district. Local Dropout Prevention Teams should pay particular attention not only to those initiatives in place within the schools but also to extra-curricular programs and community and faith-based initiatives available outside of school.

Addressing Needs Assessment Area #4—Specify gaps between existing resources and existing prioritized needs.
The final stage in the needs assessment will be for Local Dropout Prevention Teams to assess the gaps between what is currently available from the school district and the actual needs of the at-risk populations.

Summary

Please note that the needs assessment process and forms do not need to be submitted to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention. Rather, the
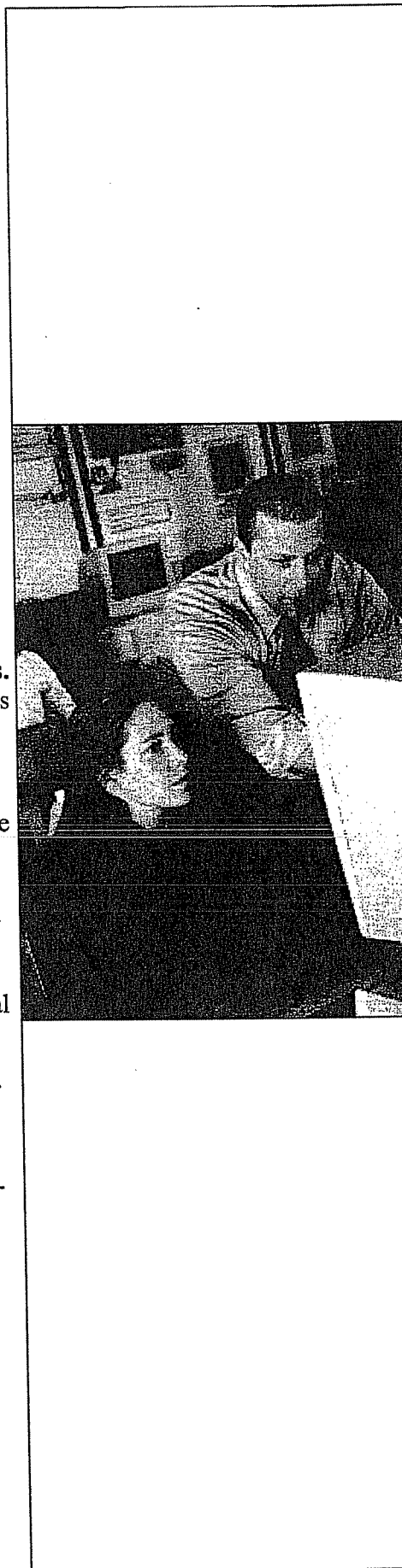
process work and forms are to be used by the Local Dropout Prevention Teams as a primary phase in the development of the local dropout prevention plans.

If any Teams require additional technical assistance in the development of the needs assessment, please contact the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention. A member of our staff will be available to provide assistance either over the telephone or in person, if necessary.
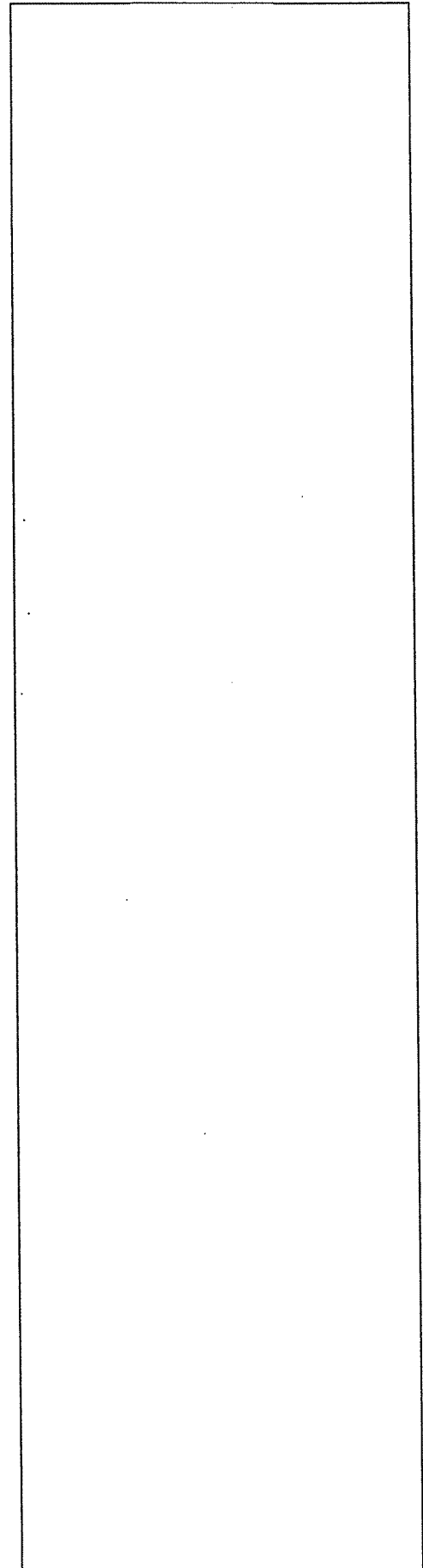
Resources

Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Principals
(Individuals or Groups)

1. Is absenteeism or truancy a problem at your school?

2. Is dropping out a problem in your school?

3. Do your think that you can predict in elementary school which children will be likely to drop out in later years (e.g., middle and high school)?

4. What do you believe are the major risk factors for dropping out?

5. Do you have any programs in place to deal with the risk factors stated?

6. How is that program working? Is it successful? Do you see any need for changes?

7. Are there any programs that you don't have but think would be useful in dealing with these risk factors?

8. Do you think teachers would agree with your opinion of the risk factors, or would they describe other risk factors?

9. How supportive is the administration of efforts to create programs to help at risk students?

Resources

Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Teachers
(Individuals or Groups)

1. How long have you been teaching? At this school?

2. Is absenteeism or truancy a problem at your school?

3. Is dropping out a problem at your school?

4. Do your think that you can predict in elementary school which children will be likely to drop out in later years (e.g., middle and high school)?

5. What do you believe are the major risk factors for dropping out?

6. What characteristics typify your struggling students?

7. What are the top two skills your students need to improve?

8. Are there any programs in place, or things that you do on your own, to deal with the risk factors you listed?

9. How is that program working? Is it successful? Do you see any need for changes?

10. Are there any programs that you do not have, but think would be useful to deal with these risk factors?

11. Do you think other teachers would agree with your opinion of the risk factors, or would they list other difficulties? What about the administration?

Resources

Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Students

1. Why do you think students are absent from school so much?

2. Why do you think students choose to drop out of school?

3. What do you think could be done to increase school attendance?

4. What would help make you more interested in coming to school? What could parents do? What could teachers do?

5. What do you think could be done to help students do better and make better grades? What could teachers do? Parents?

6. Do you think that students feel safe here at school? If not, what could be done to make this a safer place and to make students feel more comfortable?

7. Do you think there are ever things going on in the homes of students that make it difficult for them to take school seriously, or to concentrate when they get there? If so, what?

8. What do you like the most/least about school?

9. What makes learning fun for you?

Needs Assessment Survey
(for Parents, Students, Community Partners)

We are interested in determining the dropout prevention needs for our district. We believe that both absenteeism and truancy are important predictors of dropping out of school. Please rate the degree to which you believe each of the following is a possible cause of absenteeism and truancy in your school district. Please circle the number that reflects your agreement with the statement.

Possible Causes	Not a Cause			Definitely a Cause	
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Students come to school unprepared to do school work (e.g., they don't have books, papers, pencil; they haven't completed their homework).	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not have the social skills necessary to be successful in a school environment (communication, cooperation, following rules, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not have the basic skills that will enable them to learn (e.g., reading, writing, math)	1	2	3	4	5
Students have behavioral and/or emotional problems that interfere with learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Students have inadequate health care, and so are often home sick.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are not motivated.	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not feel safe and secure at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not taking responsibility for getting their children to school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not involved enough with school in general.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not involved enough with their child's academics (e.g., homework, preparedness).	1	2	3	4	5
Negative events in the child's home life are interfering with learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools do not have a good method of communicating with the home.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents do not feel welcomed or comfortable at their child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents do not know how to help their child be more successful at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents often do not know about PTO meetings, or other special events at their child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents have too many personal problems themselves to be concerned about school attendance.	1	2	3	4	5

Needs Assessment Survey
(for Principals, Teachers, and Other School Staff)

We are interested in determining the dropout prevention needs for our district. Please comment on the need at your particular school for the following types of programs. If there are programs currently being used by your school that are not listed in this survey, please add them in the additional space provided. Please circle the response/number that reflects your opinion of the programs.

Program	We already have a program similar to this one.		If yes, we need to change or improve our current program					If no, we need a program similar to this one.				
	YES	NO	Agree			Disagree		Agree			Disagree	
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Behavioral incentives geared toward increasing attendance	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tutoring program to help students with basic reading skills	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tutoring program to help students with general academics	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Program to increase communications between home and school	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Program to help parents with parenting skills	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Partnership with local business(es)	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												

Office of Dropout Prevention /
Compulsory School Attendance
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Appendix C – Guidelines for the Development of a Local Dropout Prevention Plan

Part III:

Guidelines for the Development of a
Local Dropout Prevention Plan

Dropout Prevention in Mississippi:

Developing Educational

Partnerships for Academic

Success!

Guidelines for the Development of a District-Level Dropout Prevention Plan

In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal V** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan, this document provides guidelines to local school districts on the development of a District-Level Dropout Prevention Plan. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).

Dropout Prevention Timeline

The draft version of the Mississippi Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan was adopted by the State Board of Education in February 2007. The plan details current state-level initiatives in dropout prevention, presents timelines for nine implementation goals, and sets forth seven additional critical components for future implementation. Using the 15 Strategies for Dropout Prevention (from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network) as the conceptual framework, the various initiatives listed in the plan seek to accomplish three overarching goals:

1. Increase the graduation rate for cohort classes on a systematic basis to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year, as mandated by Mississippi Code §37-13-80;
2. Reduce the dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013; and
3. Reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013.

To date, the following state Implementation Goals have been met by the Mississippi Department of Education:

▪ **Implementation Goal I** in the state plan indicates that the Mississippi Department of Education will provide comparative data on Mississippi's grade 9-12 cohort dropout rate and grade 7-12 cohort dropout rate, according to the following timeline:

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2001-2002

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2002-2003

- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2003-2004

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- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 6-year (7-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with seventh grade students in 2001-2002

  During the November 2006 board meeting of the State Board of Education, state and district level graduation and dropout rates were presented. The data were then approved in the December board meeting. According to the timeline above, additional data will be forthcoming in April 2007.

- **Implementation Goal II** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan presented the formal request to districts for the submission of names and areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Local Dropout Prevention Team.

- In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal III,** the Office of Dropout Prevention disseminated the guidelines for the development of a district needs assessment to local school districts.

- During the Mississippi Department of Education's Summer Conference (June 11-14, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities were available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment, in fulfillment of **Implementation Goal IV**.

Future Implementation Goals include the following:

- **Implementation Goal VI** - During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans. Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:
  - September - Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
  - October - Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
  - November - Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts

- **Implementation Goal VII** - Local districts should submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule
  - Northern School Districts - February 1, 2008
  - Central School Districts - March 3, 2008
  - Southern School Districts - April 1, 2008

- **Implementation Goal VIII** - Local school boards shall adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.

- **Implementation Goal IX** - Local plans should be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.

In addition to providing guidelines for implementation, this report will also present information on current national and state level research and initiatives. It is the hope of the Office of Dropout Prevention that this work will prove useful in allowing school districts and stakeholders to make research-based and data-driven decisions in the work of dropout prevention.
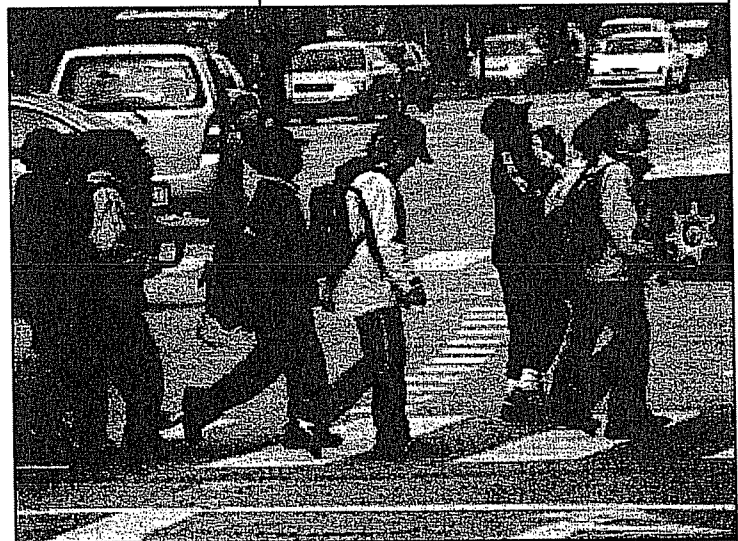
Developing a District-Level Dropout Prevention Plan

The material that follows presents a discussion of the district-level dropout prevention plan components and the target group the plan will serve.

Following the completion of the needs assessment, the District Dropout Prevention Team will detail the implementation of current district-level initiatives related to K-12 dropout prevention, in addition to proposed initiatives. The plan shall include the following components:

1. A District Dropout Prevention Plan cover sheet and Dropout Prevention Team sign-off sheet, containing the following information:
   - The local contact person's name, position, title, address, telephone number, and fax number
   - The district name and a list of the schools (elementary, middle and high) within the district
   - The names and signatures of District Dropout Prevention Team members

2. A Statement of Assurance, containing the following information:
   - The district dropout prevention team leader's name, title, address, telephone number, and fax number
   - The approval signature of the district superintendent and school board chair

3. Outcomes of the needs assessment
   - Identification of students in need of targeted assistance
   - Identification of potential risk factors
   - Needs statements
   - Prioritization of needs

4. Details of current district initiatives
   - Addressing the MDE's Five Strategic Initiatives
   - Addressing the National Dropout Prevention Center's (NDPC) 15 Strategies for Dropout Prevention
   - Highlighting school level impact (elementary, middle, high school)

5. Proposed initiatives with prioritized actions. Both current and proposed initiatives should include:
   - District goals that describe the overall end result the district wishes to achieve to address dropout prevention. (Note: Local districts may require school-level plans based on individual school needs and variations in dropout rates). The goals should be:
     - Derived from the prioritized needs of the school
     - Stated in terms of student outcomes

- Measurable
- Specific and clear
- Achievable
- Long-term (three to five years)
- Based on established start date and completion dates
  - Benchmarks to serve as implementation checkpoints, to allow a district to assess how well it is progressing towards its goal.
  - A description of the persons who will be responsible for the implementation of the goal.

6. An evaluation component that provides evidence of the achievement of the objective. The evaluation component should:
   - Be measurable
   - Be directly related to the objective
   - Include evaluation data collected along the way (when possible)
   - Identify the source of evaluation information identified

7. Plans will initially be reviewed by MDE staff members. Further monitoring and review of implementation will be the responsibility of the Office of Dropout Prevention.

Dropout Prevention Plan
Cover Sheet (Part I)

School District: _____

Superintendent: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Principal: _____   _____
_____(please print or type)_____   _____(signature)

School Name: _____   ___ Elementary ___ Middle ___ High ___Other
(please check one)

Dropout Prevention Plan
Cover Sheet (Part II)
Local Dropout Prevention Team Members—Final

School District: _____ **Telephone #:** _____

Mailing Address: _____ **Fax #:** _____

_____

**E-mail address for
Superintendent/Team Leader:** _____

Please check one area for each:

	Civic/ Gov't Agency Rep.	Community Rep.	School Staff
Superintendent (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Team Leader (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Team Sponsor (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Team Parent (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Team Associate (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____	___	___	___
Dropout Prevention Team Member (please print) _____ (signature) _____			

STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES

On behalf of the _____ School District, I hereby submit a local Dropout Prevention Plan to provide goals, activities and services necessary to meet the three overarching goals of the state dropout prevention plan: 1) Increasing the state graduation rate to 85% by 2018-2019; 2) reduce the state dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013; and 3) reducing the truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013.

I hereby certify that the information contained in this plan is in compliance with the appropriate federal and state laws and regulations.

I hereby certify that our school district will cooperate in carrying out any evaluation conducted by or for the Mississippi Department of Education.

I hereby certify that our school district will submit reports as requested by the Mississippi Department of Education.

I hereby certify that our school district has consulted with parents, community partners, business partners, teachers, school staff, building administrators, and others in the development of this local dropout prevention plan.

I hereby certify that our school district has taken into account relevant, scientifically based research, strategies and best practices indicating services most effective in preventing dropouts if we focused on students in the earliest grades.

I hereby certify that our school district will prepare and submit an annual progress report on increasing the graduation rate, reducing the dropout rate and reducing the truancy rate.

I hereby certify that our school district will endorse and implement the fifteen (15) effective strategies to promote a reduction in the dropout rate.

I hereby certify that our school district has based the dropout prevention plan on scientifically based research, best practices and all laws in determining strategies to reduce the dropout rate for students with disabilities under IDEIA.

I hereby certify that our school district will evaluate our district dropout prevention plan on an annual basis to determine appropriate changes needed for future school years.

I hereby certify that our District School Board has reviewed and approved this plan for submission to the Mississippi Department of Education.

Dropout Prevention Team Leader:

Name: _____   Title: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone #: _____   Fax #: _____

District Superintendent: _____   _____
                              (please print)   (signature)

School Board Chair: _____   _____
                         (please print)   (signature)

Current Research in Dropout Prevention

This portion of the report focuses on current research initiatives in the area of dropout prevention. The information contained in these reports may prove to be valuable resources in the development of district dropout prevention plans.

- **Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs**
  This new study, conducted by the National Dropout Prevention Center Network, and sponsored by Communities in Schools, Inc., finds that there are multiple risk factors that increase the likelihood that students will drop out. The evidence clearly shows that dropout is always the result of a long process of disengagement that sometimes begins before the child enrolls in kindergarten. The report also provides information on 50 programs that were found to be effective in addressing these risk factors.
  C. Hammond, J. Smink, & S. Drew: National Dropout Prevention Center. D. Linton: Communities in Schools, Inc. May 2007
  Found at: http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools.htm

- **What Your Community Can Do to End Its Drop Out Crisis**
  This report outlines the three essential steps a community may use to end its dropout crisis. First, the community needs to understand its dropout crisis and the resources it is currently devoting to ending it. Second, the community needs to develop a strategic dropout prevention, intervention and recovery plan that focuses community resources, efforts and reforms at the key points where and when students fall off the path to high school graduation. Finally, the community will need to gather the human and financial resources needed for a comprehensive and sustained campaign and develop the evaluation, accountability and continuous improvement mechanisms needed to maintain it.
  Balfanz, R. (2007, May). *What Your Community Can Do to End Its Drop Out Crisis: Learnings from Research and Practice.* Prepared for the National Summit on America's Silent Epidemic, Washington, D.C.
  Found at: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout_prevention/Balfanz_final.pdf

- **The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts**
  A primary purpose of this report is to approach the dropout problem from a perspective that has not been much considered in past studies—that of the students themselves. These efforts were designed to paint a more in-depth picture of who these young people are, why they dropped out of high school, and what might have helped them complete their high school education. In an effort to better understand the lives and circumstances of students who drop out of high school and help ground the research in the stories and reflections of the former students themselves, a series of focus groups and a survey were conducted of young people aged 16-25 who identified them-

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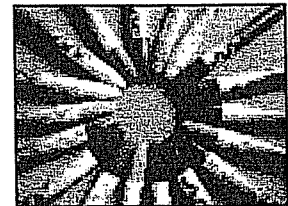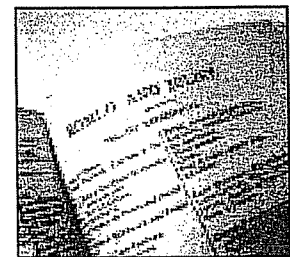
selves as high school dropouts in 25 different locations throughout the United States. These interviews took place in large cities, suburbs and small towns with high dropout rates.

Civic Enterprises in Association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2006). *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts.*

Found at: http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf

■ **Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies**

This research focuses on answering the following questions: What are the national and regional dropout trends?; What does the research say about factors associated with dropping out?; What state, local, or private efforts have been implemented to address the factors associated with dropping out?; What federal efforts exist to reduce dropout rates and what is known about their effectiveness? (Note: This report was published in 2002—information in this report may be somewhat dated).

General Accounting Office Report 02-240. (2002). Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies. Washington, D.C.

Found at: http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02240.pdf

■ **Best Practices in Dropout Prevention**

This document was developed by the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention in response to requests from districts for information-sharing on best practices in Mississippi. In a presentation to the SCMCEED group by Dr. Fred Johnson in June 2007, districts were asked to provide recommendations on programs currently being operated by their district that represent the four broad areas of dropout prevention.

Found at: http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout_Prevention/Best%20Practices%20in%20Dropout%20Prevention.pdf

Some Quick Tips on Funding District Dropout Prevention Initiatives

This portion of the report presents several ways in which districts may access funding opportunities to assist in the development and implementation of dropout prevention initiatives. The results of your district-level needs assessment, when properly documented, will be a valuable resource for demonstrating the specific areas in need of funding. Be prepared to present these results when requesting funding.

Sources of Funding:

Title I, Part D Funding—If there are Title I schools in your district, you may wish to use a portion of your Title I funding for at-risk/dropout prevention initiatives. According to Section 1432 of Title I, Part D, an at-risk youth is one who:

- Is at risk of academic failure
- Has a drug or alcohol problem
- Is pregnant or is a parent
- Has come into contact with the juvenile justice system in the past
- Is at least one year behind the expected grade level for his or her age
- Has limited English proficiency
- Is a gang member
- Has dropped out of school in the past
- Has a high absenteeism rate at school

Funding from Area Businesses: National Chain Stores—
Companies such as Wal-Mart, Target, Home Depot and Kroger have demonstrated a strong commitment to education. If program incentives are needed for your dropout prevention initiatives, (i.e. "Perfect Attendance" Clubs, "School Store" giveaways, "Parent Pizza and Learn" Night, etc.), try contacting the manager at you local chain store to see what small or large items they may be able to contribute.
The Dollar General Back-to-School Grants provide funding to assist schools in meeting some of the financial challenges they face in implementing new programs or purchasing new equipment, materials or software for their school library or literacy program. The maximum award is $5,000.00. All school districts in Mississippi are eligible for this grant. The deadline is August 10, 2007. For more information go to: www.dollargeneral.com/communityinvestments.aspx?Category=Community&SubCategory=Grant%20Programs#BackToSchoolGiving

Funding from Area Businesses: Community-Based Stores— Local area businesses have an inherent investment in the well-being of their communities. Local business owners are very aware that when their communities are vibrant, so are their companies. In addition, local businesses will, in most cases, have greater flexibility regarding the amount of money, products and even human resources which can be allocated for school/community programs.
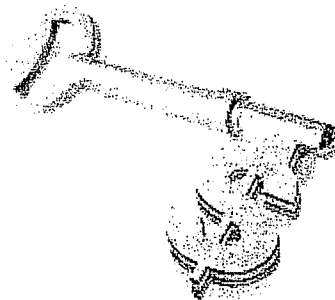
Funding from Local Businesses: National Chain Stores Small Learning Communities (SLC) Federal Grant Program—The SLC program awards discretionary grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to support the implementation of SLCs and activities to improve student academic achievement in **large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students**. SLCs include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes, ``houses" in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and autonomous schools-within-a-school, as well as personalization strategies, such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs. The deadline for the current grant cohort submission is July 27th, but there will likely be an additional cohort added this Fall. Please contact the Office of Dropout Prevention for further details.

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Appendix D - Regional Technical Assistance Training
List of Districts Trained – 126 Districts Received Training on the Dropout Prevention Plan
(468 Individuals received the training.)

Aberdeen	Grenada	Marshall	Richton
Amory	Gulfport	McComb	Scott
Attala	Hazlehurst	Meridian	Simpson
Bay-Waveland	Hancock	Monroe	Smith
Baldwyn	Harrison	Montgomery	South Delta
Benoit	Hattiesburg	Moss Point	South Panola
Benton	Hinds	Mound Bayou	South Pike
Brookhaven	Hollandale	North Panola	South Tippah
Calhoun	Holly Springs	North Tippah	Starkville
Canton	Holmes	Nettleton	Stone
Carroll	Houston	New Albany	Sunflower
Chickasaw	Humphreys	Neshoba	Tate
Choctaw	Indianola	Newton County	Tippah
Clarksdale	Jackson	Newton	Tishomingo
Claiborne	JPS	Municipal	Tupelo
Clinton	Jones	North Pike	Union
Coahoma	Kosciusko	Noxubee	Vicksburg-Warren
Coffeeville	Lafayette	Ocean Springs	Warren
Columbia	Lauderdale	Okolona	Walthall
Columbus	Lamar	Oktibbeha	Washington
Copiah	Laurel	Oxford	Water Valley
Covington	Lawrence	Pass Christian	Webster
DeSoto	Leake	Pearl River	West Bolivar
Drew	Lee	Perry	West Jasper
East Tallahatchie	Leflore	Petal	West Point
Forest	Lincoln	Philadelphia	West Tallahatchie
Forrest	Long Beach	Picayune	Western Line
Franklin	Louisville	Ponotoc	Wilkinson
George	Lowndes	Poplarville	Winona
Greene	Lumberton	Prentiss	Yalobusha
Greenville	Madison	Quitman Public	Yazoo County
Greenwood	Marion	Rankin	

Appendix E - Districts Visited during school year 2006-2007 school year and summer 2007
48 school districts total

Jackson Public Schools (repeat visits)

Canton Public Schools (repeat visits)

Amory Public Schools, April 12, 2007

Louisville Session – June 25, 2007
Louisville Municipal School District
Leake County Schools
Choctaw County Schools
Oktibbeha County Schools
Starkville Public Schools
Webster County Schools
Philadelphia School District
Noxubee County School

Sunflower Session – June 26, 2007
Sunflower County Schools
Indianola School District
Drew School District
Cleveland School District
Clarksdale Public Schools

Meridian Sessions – July 24th and 30th, 2007
Forest County Schools
Neshoba County Schools
Scott County Schools
Meridian Public Schools
West Point Public Schools
Newton City Schools
Noxubee County Schools
Lauderdale County Schools
Quitman County Schools
Union County Schools
Kemper County Schools

Biloxi Sessions – August 14th and September 4th, 2007
Biloxi Public Schools
Bay Waveland School District
Columbia School District
Gulfport School District

Hancock County School District
Harrison County School District
Jackson County School District
Moss Point School District
Ocean Springs School District
Pass Christian School District
Pearl River School District
Petal School District
Picayune School District
Poplarville School District
Stone County School District

Columbus Public Schools – August 22, 2007

Hattiesburg Session – August 23, 2007
Hattiesburg Public Schools
Lamar County Schools
Forrest Public Schools
Laurel Public Schools

Madison County School District – August 30, 2007

Appendix F – Evaluations from 2007 Regional Technical Assistance Training Sessions on Dropout Prevention

Northern Districts

The format of the training was well organized
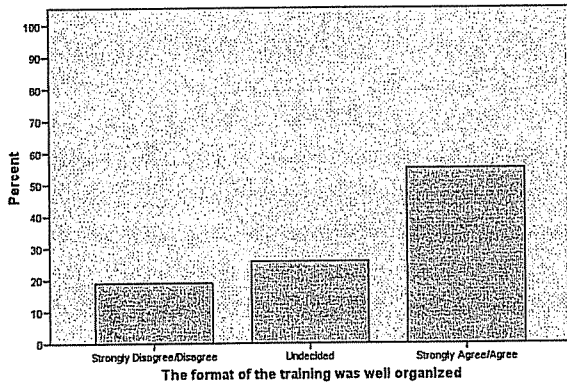
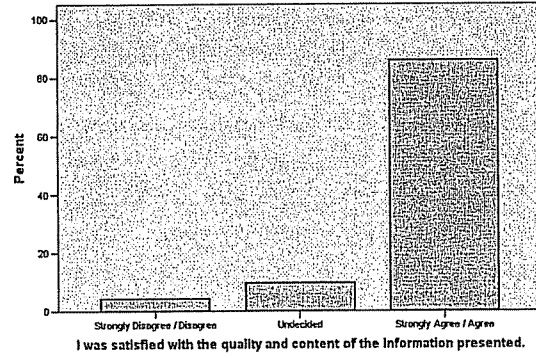### The presenters/trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter.
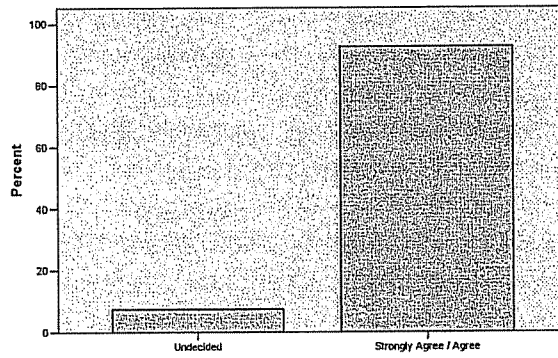

The presenters/trainers were well prepared.
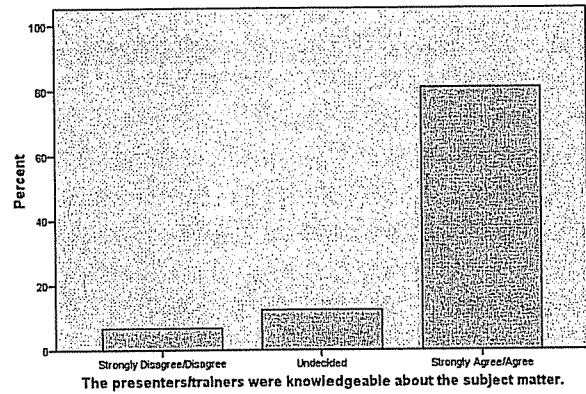
I was satisfied with the quality and content of the information presented.
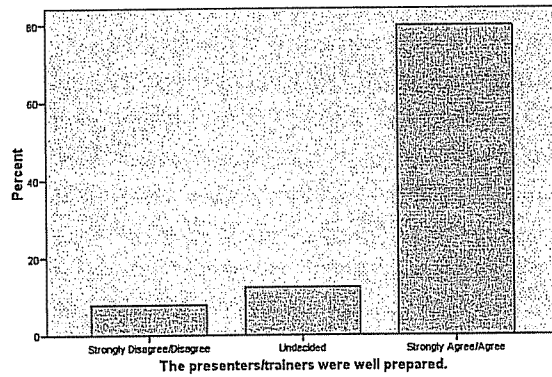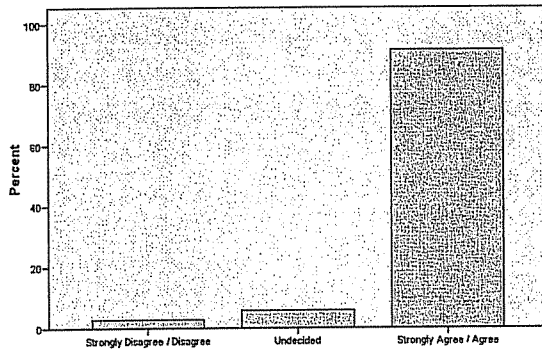
The training materials were informative and useful.
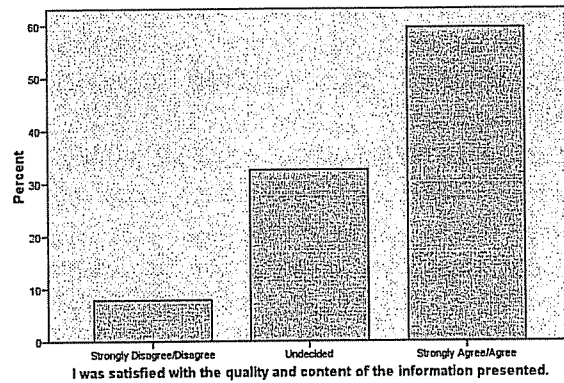
The training materials were informative and useful.
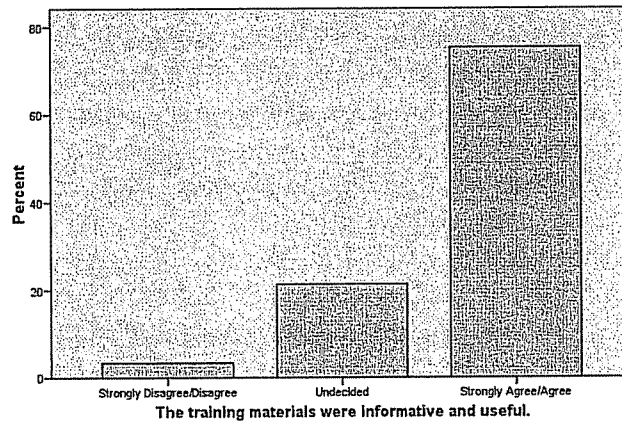
Central Districts

The format of the training was well organized
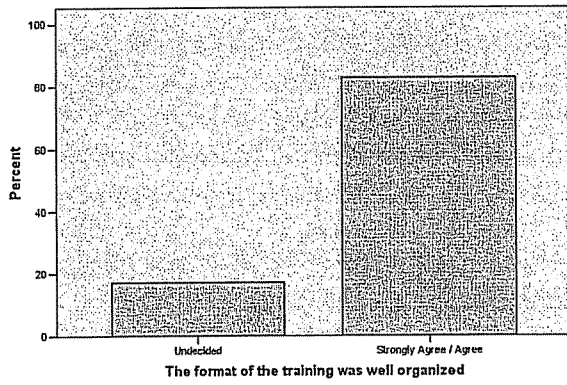
The format of the training was well organized

The presenters/trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter.

The presenters/trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter.

The presenters/trainers were well prepared.
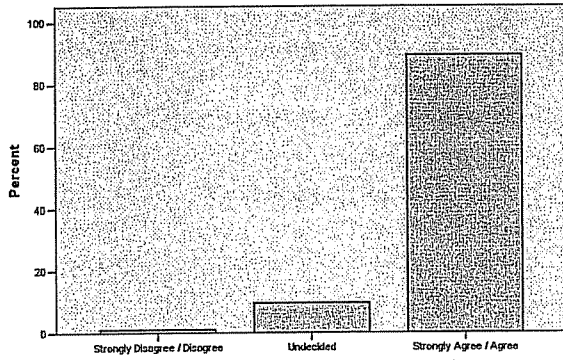
The presenters/trainers were well prepared.

I was satisfied with the quality and content of the information presented.

I was satisfied with the quality and content of the information presented.

The training materials were informative and useful.
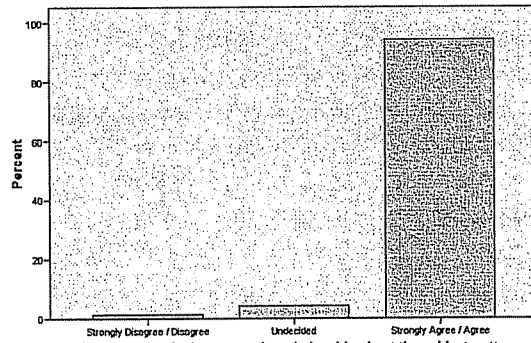

The training materials were informative and useful.

Southern Districts

The format of the training was well organized


The format of the training was well organized

### The presenters/trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter.

The presenters/trainers were knowledgeable about the subject matter.

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The presenters/trainers were well prepared.

The presenters/trainers were well prepared.

I was satisfied with the quality and content of the Information presented.

I was satisfied with the quality and content of the Information presented.

The training materials were Informative and useful.

The training materials were Informative and useful.

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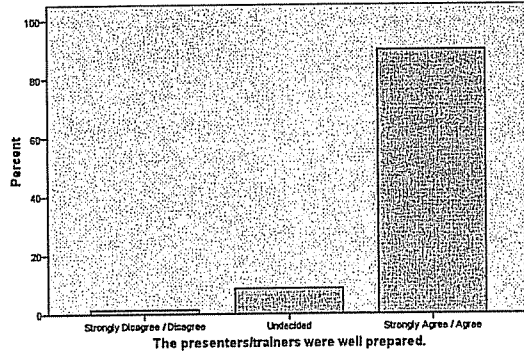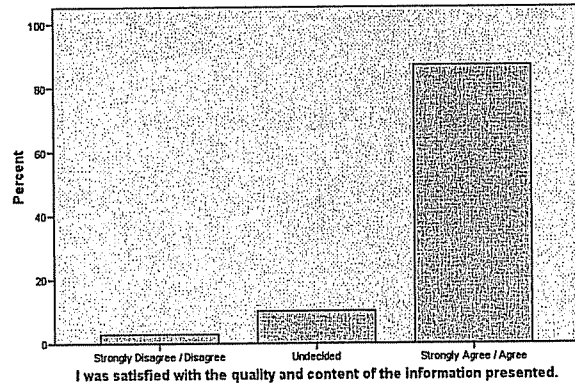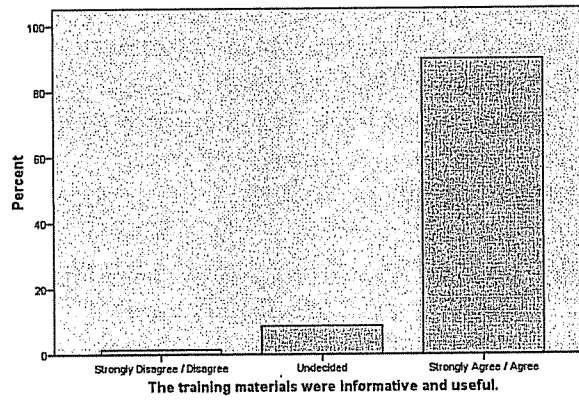
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