



# PUBLIC COMMENT REPORT

## Mississippi's Education Plan and the Every Student Succeeds Act

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### EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in December 2015. It is the latest version of the nation's main K-12 law that has a longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. The law aims to scale back the hands-on federal role in elementary and secondary education found in the No Child Left Behind legislation. Mississippi is deeply committed to improving opportunities and outcomes for every Mississippi student, and ESSA provides a golden opportunity to help us achieve this vision.

### PUBLIC COMMENT FOR MISSISSIPPI'S EDUCATION PLAN

Between August 29 and October 13, 2016, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) facilitated 15 public meetings to gather input for Mississippi's plan to meet the requirements of ESSA. The series of meetings were called the "Mississippi Succeeds Listening Tour." In order to ensure broad stakeholder input, afternoon and evening sessions were held in locations throughout the state including Meridian, Natchez, Cleveland, Tupelo, Gulfport, Jackson, Hernando and Starkville.

The sessions consisted of an overview of Mississippi's goals, priorities and achievements in public education and small group discussions on topics related to student, school, and educator support and success. Participants included parents, college students, teachers, school and district staff and administrators, college and university faculty and staff, members of educational associations and advocacy groups, business leaders, school board members and public officials. Attendees had the opportunity to voice their ideas about how the state and local school districts can work to ensure student success, educator effectiveness and a useful and informative system of reporting student, school and district progress to communities. In addition to the listening tour meetings, regional feedback sessions were held with groups of principals and district superintendents, and the public was invited to submit input online and via email.

The following summary captures the primary themes and priorities that emerged from the Mississippi Succeeds Listening Tour discussions.

### STUDENT SUCCESS

**Characteristics of Successful Students:** Participants described successful students as self-directed, engaged and independent learners. They are well-rounded, critical thinkers who can be successful in the real world of college or career. Successful students are supported by their families and communities and learn in a safe and orderly environment where their basic needs are met. Students are successful when they are improving each year and moving to proficiency, including in the area of literacy. Other characteristics of success include problem-solving and organizational skills, confidence, creativity, ability to work as part of a team and perseverance.

**Indicators of Student Progress and Success:** Participants said assessments and report cards that show growth, proficiency and mastery of course content are indicators that students are successful. Successful students also exhibit appropriate social-emotional development and behavior and graduate from high school ready for college

and career. Parents who are involved with their child's school and maintain good communication with teachers and school leaders contribute to student success.

**What Families Need to Help Students Succeed:** Families need access to their child's school and teachers, including frequent conferences and parent nights, to help their child be successful. Teachers and school leaders need to maintain effective communication with families and provide opportunities for families to get involved at school. Families also need resources such as homework tips, web sites and activities to help students at home. Many families would also benefit from workshops or training provided by the school to help them learn strategies to help students at home

## **SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SUCCESS**

**Characteristics of Successful Schools and Districts:** Participants described successful schools as safe, orderly, nurturing and visually appealing. Successful schools employ and retain high-quality and effective teachers, administrators and staff who collaborate for the good of students. Students are engaged in their own learning and in school life, and family and community involvement is evident and encouraged. The school and district culture celebrates success, and assessment data demonstrates all students are making progress toward being college and career ready. Schools effectively use funds to provide quality resources, including up-to-date technology. Data is used to inform decisions to benefit student learning, and district-wide accountability data shows progress from year to year within the district and in comparison to other districts across the state.

**State Support Needed to Help Low-Performing Schools and Districts:** Low-performing schools and districts need access to effective teachers and leaders and quality resources. One strategy to achieve this includes offering incentives such as salary supplements or loan forgiveness to support teacher recruitment and retention. Targeted professional development is needed to build teacher and school leader capacity. Literacy coaches and regional and school-based support is needed to help low-performing schools and districts develop staff from among their own communities.

## **EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND LEADERS**

**Characteristics of Effective Teachers:** Effective teachers are professional, prepared and demonstrate strong instructional and classroom management practices. Effective teachers are able to motivate students and differentiate instruction for various learning needs. Teachers must be caring, supportive and show compassion for all students. Teachers need to be able to build relationships with students and their families and communicate openly and effectively. Effective teachers are lifelong learners who collaborate with colleagues. Experience and licensure are important, but are not sole indicators of effectiveness.

**Characteristics of Effective School Leaders:** Effective school leaders have a clear vision and support and motivate staff to carry out that vision. They lead by example, promote a positive school culture and climate and are good listeners and communicators. Effective school leaders understand the value of professional development, know how to use data to drive improvement and are strong instructional leaders.

## **EVALUATING SCHOOL QUALITY**

Participants were asked to consider what indicators, other than test scores, should be considered to assess school quality. School climate, culture and learning environment were cited as important. Other factors include teacher and school leader evaluations, student and teacher absenteeism rates and a measure of how well a school's curriculum and program offerings were meeting the diverse needs of its students. Other indicators include graduation and dropout rates, college and career readiness rates and demographic data about student poverty and students' living conditions.

**More information about Mississippi's Education Plan and ESSA can be found at: [www.mdek12.org/essa](http://www.mdek12.org/essa)**