

**OFFICE OF CHIEF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OFFICER**  
**Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items**  
**October 16-17, 2014**

**OFFICE OF ACCREDITATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

08. Approval to begin the Administrative Procedures Act process: To revise Accreditation Policy 2.9.2, *Penalty for the Withdrawal of Accreditation*, of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2014*

On October 14, 2014, the Commission on School Accreditation approved the proposed revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.9.2, *Penalty for Withdrawal of Accreditation*. Policy 2.9.2 is being revised to delay the implementation of the penalty of the district's ability to participate in interscholastic activities for one (1) calendar year following the date of the withdrawal of accreditation. This revision will allow school districts sufficient time to remove deficiencies prior to impact on interscholastic activities.

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached

## **2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY**

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the public school district level. School districts are held accountable for Accreditation Policies and Process Standards and receive an annual accreditation status. Standards of the performance-based accreditation system recommended by the Commission and adopted by the State Board of Education are contained in the current edition of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*.

### **2.1 ASSIGNMENT OF DISTRICT ACCREDITATION STATUSES**

The Commission on School Accreditation determines the annual accreditation status of all public school districts in the fall of each school year based on verified accreditation data from the previous school year. An annual district accreditation status is assigned based on compliance with Process Standards. Information concerning district compliance with Process Standards is reported to the Commission on an annual basis. (See Policy 2.2 below.)

The district superintendent and school principals are responsible for ensuring that all data reported to the Mississippi Department of Education are true and accurate as verified by supporting documentation on file in the school district. Reporting false information is a violation of the accreditation requirements set forth by the State Board of Education and may result in the downgrading of the district's accreditation status.

After the Commission takes action on accreditation records presented, the district superintendent and the chairperson of the local school board are notified of the status assigned. The decision of the Commission is final unless appealed by the school board of the school district to the State Board of Education in accordance with the appeal procedures in Policy 6.0 of this document.

### **2.2 PROCESS STANDARDS**

Process (input) Standards address accepted educational principles and practices that are believed to promote educational quality. Any verified violation of a Process Standard is noted on the record of a school district at the time of discovery within any school year, but does not affect the current accreditation status of the district. (See Policy 2.5 for the exceptions.) If a noted violation of a Process Standard has not been corrected by the following school year when accreditation statuses are assigned, the violation is reported to the Commission for appropriate action.

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, reserves the right to suspend school district compliance of any Accreditation Process Standard that is not directly mandated by state or federal law. (See Policy 4.2 for Rewards.)

### **2.3 ANNUAL ACCREDITATION STATUSES**

In the fall of each year, every public school district will be assigned an annual accreditation status based on compliance with Process Standards and Accreditation Policies.

**ACCREDITED** is assigned to a district that complies with Accreditation Policies and 100% of the Process Standards. (See exceptions in Appendices F and H.)

**PROBATION** is assigned to a district that complies with fewer than 100% of the Accreditation Policies and Process Standards. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

*MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS, 2014*  
Proposed Revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY  
Approved by the Commission on School Accreditation October 14, 2014

**WITHDRAWN** is assigned to a district that has previously been assigned a PROBATION status and still does not comply with its Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Any school district placed in conservatorship may have its accreditation withdrawn. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

## **2.4 NOTIFICATION OF DEFICIENCIES AFTER ASSIGNMENT OF STATUS**

After the annual assignment of a district's accreditation status, the process of determining statuses for the following school year begins. When information on file in the Mississippi Department of Education indicates that a school district may be in violation of a standard, the superintendent and the school board of the district are informed in writing by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. School district officials are given thirty (30) days from the date of receipt of notification to provide a written response verifying accuracy or inaccuracy of the notice of possible noncompliance with the standard.

If the written response includes appropriate evidence to correct or refute the alleged violation, the superintendent of the district is notified by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. Any verified violation of a standard is reported in writing to the Office of Accreditation, where it is noted on the current Accreditation Record Summary of the district. (See Glossary for definition of Accreditation Record Summary.) The appropriate staff member in the Office of Accreditation notifies the superintendent of the district in writing of the verified violation.

## **2.5 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT AN IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN ACCREDITATION STATUS**

An assigned accreditation status may remain unchanged during that school year except in those cases where verified noncompliance of accreditation standards may downgrade an accreditation status immediately, in accordance with Sections 2.5.1 or 2.5.2.

### **2.5.1 Recommended Accreditation Status – PROBATION**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to Probation.

- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information,
- Standard 1.1, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 1.2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations,
- Standards 4 and 5, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements,
- Standard 14, failure to comply with graduation requirements,
- Standard 16, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System,
- Standards 17.1-17.8, failure to comply with state/federal regulations, or
- Standards 29, 30, and 31, failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

### **2.5.2 Recommended Accreditation Status – WITHDRAWN**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include withdrawal of the district's accreditation.

- Standard 1.1, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 1.2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations,

*MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS, 2014*  
Proposed Revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY  
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- Standards 4 and 5, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements of a serious nature,
- Standard 14, failure to comply with graduation requirements specified in Standards 14.1, 14.2, and 14.5,
- Standard 16, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System in Appendix F, numbers 8 and 9,
- Standards 17.4-17.6, federal programs whose regulations call for strong sanctions for continued patterns of noncompliance, or
- Standards 29, 30, and 31, failure to comply with standards that pose life-threatening conditions for students and staff.

## **2.6 RESOLVING ACCREDITATION CONTROVERSIES**

All controversies involving the accreditation statuses of school districts are initially heard by a duly authorized representative of the Commission in accordance with Section 37-17-5, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, and Policy 6.0.

## **2.7 CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS OR TRANSFER OF GRADES**

When two (2) or more school districts consolidate or when two (2) or more school boards approve the transfer of a grade or grades, the affected school district(s) may be allowed to maintain its accreditation status for a period of time to be determined upon application to the Commission on School Accreditation. The Commission on School Accreditation shall review the application of any such affected school district(s) and submit a recommendation to the State Board of Education for approval.

## **2.8 CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN (CAP) AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

### **2.8.1 Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with Definitive Timelines**

When a school district has been assigned a PROBATION or WITHDRAWN accreditation status, the Mississippi Department of Education, in conjunction with the school district, shall develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines in which to correct the district's deficiencies. The State Board of Education implements the program of development in each district assigned a PROBATION or WITHDRAWN status in accordance with Section 37-17-6(10), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

The school district is required to submit a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) within sixty (60) days of notification. The plan must stipulate what will be done to remove the deficiencies and the time line required. The plan must be approved by the local school board as documented by official minutes and bear the signatures of the school board chairperson and district superintendent. When corrective action has been implemented to remove a citation, the school district must submit documentary evidence confirming such to the Office of Accreditation. Assigned MDE staff may conduct follow-up visits as necessary to verify corrective action and compliance.

### **2.8.2 Withdrawal of Accreditation**

If the district's deficiencies are not removed during the time specified in the Corrective Action Plan (CAP), the school district is subject to having its accreditation withdrawn by the Commission on School Accreditation in accordance with Section 37-17-6, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. The status of the district will be listed as WITHDRAWN NOT ACCREDITED, and the record of that district will continue to be maintained.

*MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS, 2014*  
Proposed Revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY  
Approved by the Commission on School Accreditation October 14, 2014

**2.8.2.1 Hearings**

Before requesting approval from the State Board of Education to withdraw the accredited status of a district, the Commission on School Accreditation conducts a hearing (See Policy 2.9 for exception) to allow the officials of the affected district to present evidence or other reasons why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. {MS Code 37-17-6(11)(a)}

**2.8.2.2 Results of Hearings**

Within forty-five (45) calendar days of the conclusion of the hearing and after consideration of the results of the hearing, the Commission on School Accreditation shall be authorized, with the approval of the State Board of Education, to withdraw the accreditation of the district and may issue a request to the Governor that a state of emergency be declared in that district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(11)(a), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. If the decision is made not to withdraw the accredited status of the district, a new timeline is established in the district's Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

**2.8.2.3 Public Notice**

After a state of emergency has been declared, the Commission files a public notice at least once a week for at least three (3) consecutive weeks in a newspaper published within the immediate or general vicinity of the affected school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(12), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

**2.8.2.4 Access to School District Records**

School districts are required to produce necessary reports, correspondence, financial statements, and any other documents necessary for the Commission to implement this section on withdrawal of accreditation and conservatorship.

**2.8.2.5 Reinstatement of an Accredited Status**

Based on the recommendation from the Office of Accreditation or the State Superintendent of Education, the superintendent and school board president of a school district whose accreditation has been withdrawn may file a petition with the Commission on School Accreditation for reinstatement of accreditation to be effective on January 1 or July 1. The Commission on School Accreditation shall require all school districts that petition for reinstatement of accreditation to appear before the Commission on School Accreditation to furnish evidence satisfactory to the Commission that the school district is in compliance with all accreditation standards prior to the reinstatement of accreditation.

**2.9 CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCY STATUS AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

**2.9.1 Declaration of State of Emergency**

The State Board of Education may request the Governor to declare a state of emergency in any school district when any of the following emergency situations occur. Upon the declaration of the state of emergency by the Governor, the State Board of Education may take all such action for dealing with the school districts as authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Section 37-17-6, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, including the withdrawal of the district's accreditation.

**2.9.1.1 Emergency Situation**

The State Board of Education and the Commission on School Accreditation determine that an extreme emergency situation exists in a school district which jeopardizes the safety, security, or educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in that district, and such emergency situation is believed to be related to a serious violation or violations of accreditation standards or state or federal law. For purposes of this paragraph, the declarations of a state of emergency shall not be limited to those instances when a school district's impairments are related to a lack of financial resources, but also shall include serious

*MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS, 2014*  
Proposed Revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY  
Approved by the Commission on School Accreditation October 14, 2014

failure to meet minimum academic standards, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor student performance. {Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended}

**2.9.1.2 Failing School District**

A school district meets the State Board of Education's definition of a failing school district for two (2) consecutive full school years. {Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended}

**2.9.1.3 Schools At-Risk**

A school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, or in the event that more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk in any one (1) year. {Section 37-18-7(2), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended} (See Policy 3.4.1 for Schools At-Risk designation.)

**2.9.2 Penalty for the Withdrawal of Accreditation**

**Policy 2.9.2 will become effective one (1) calendar year following the Withdrawal of Accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation and the State Board of Education.**

The withdrawal of a school district's accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation will result in the following:

- A school or schools within a district shall be limited to participation in no more than fifty percent (50%) of the regular season of any interscholastic activity, which shall include division/district/regional games,
- The interscholastic season schedule for a school or schools within a district shall not include the opening day of season or any type of post season participation, as determined by the Office of Accreditation, and
- Cheerleading, drill and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music, and band may participate in district or state contest, but shall not be eligible to receive ratings.

All schedule requests must be submitted in writing to the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Accreditation, at least thirty (30) days prior to the beginning of the season. **The Office of Accreditation shall pre-approve all schedules and participation in interscholastic activities.** In addition to the suspension of all post season activities, the school district shall not be allowed to participate in jamborees, special games, parades, tournaments, holiday tournaments, or competitions of any nature.

Failure to comply with section 2.9.2 will result in the suspension of ALL interscholastic activities.

Failure of a district to have its accreditation reinstated by the Commission on School Accreditation after a period of two (2) calendar years from the date of the withdrawal of accreditation shall result in the immediate suspension of ALL interscholastic activities until the district's accreditation status is reinstated.

Note: Interscholastic activities include, but are not limited to, football, basketball, baseball, track and field, cross country, tennis, golf, volleyball, softball (fast pitch and slow pitch), soccer, wrestling, swimming, power lifting, bowling, archery, cheerleading, drill, and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music, and band.

*MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS, 2014*  
Proposed Revisions to Accreditation Policy 2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY  
Approved by the Commission on School Accreditation October 14, 2014

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