

**OFFICE OF INSTRUCTIONAL ENHANCEMENT AND INTERNAL OPERATIONS**  
**Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items**  
**February 20-21, 2014**

**OFFICE OF INSTRUCTIONAL ENHANCEMENT AND INTERNAL OPERATIONS**

08. Approval to award discretionary grants to school districts to implement innovative high school programs

Purpose: The Mississippi Department of Education is awarding discretionary grants to assist eligible public school districts in implementing innovative high school programs to provide students with the maximum opportunity for success after high school. The innovative high school programs will also help reduce dropout rates and better prepare students for a global society. The grant funds will be used for assessment cost and execution of the district's innovative model with fidelity.

Scope of Grant:

- Grant Period: February 24, 2014 – June 30, 2014
- Award Amount: \$669,702 (Based on per pupil assessment cost and a per school district implementation funding)
- Method of Award: Discretionary

Funding Source: State Funds

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
***Innovative High School Grant Awards***

<b>School Districts</b>	<b>Innovative Model</b>	<b>Per Pupil Assessment Cost</b>	<b>District Implementation Funding For Professional Development</b>	<b>Total Award Amount</b>
Clarksdale Municipal School District	Cambridge	\$114,750	\$50,000	\$164,750
Columbia School District	ACT Quality Core	\$33,422	\$50,000	\$83,422
Corinth School District	Cambridge	\$136,000	\$50,000	\$186,000
Gulfport School District	ACT	\$31,696	\$50,000	\$81,696
Lamar County School District	ACT Quality Core	\$103,834	\$50,000	\$153,834
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$419,702</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<b>\$669,702</b>

# Innovative High School Pilot Programs

## *Overview and Preliminary Evaluation – Interim Report*

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### **Introduction**

Excellence for All is an innovative high school model developed by the National Center on Education and Economy (NCEE). Excellence for All combines the tools provided by the world's best Board Examination systems, the high school structure used in many high performing countries, and American ideas of educational equality.

Excellence for All focuses on a strong core curriculum comprised of coursework that is the most relevant for preparing high school graduates to succeed in college or in a career. The Excellence for All curricula take the guesswork out of what students are expected to know and be able to do because the standards are explicitly stated for all courses. Teachers also receive high-quality professional development that enhances their skills both in knowledge of the content and effective delivery of content.

All the data elements needed to operate a universal high school accountability system are built into the assessment systems of Board Examination systems. Student mastery of content is assessed using high quality exams that are typically comprised of essays and constructed response questions for which students must write extended responses. They are much more valid for assessing higher order skills and knowledge than the typical American large-scale, standardized achievement test, and they satisfy international test reliability standards. Exams are scored by third-party, professional scorers ensuring that assessment scores are scalable, accurate and consistent. Test results are provided to the schools in a form that allows users to aggregate up to the school and district level so to be shared with students, their parents, school faculty, districts, states, prospective employers and community college and university admissions offices. This system can also be used to produce student growth data for subjects such as English and math with a logical progression of learning from year to year.

Students have the opportunity to exit high school at the end of their sophomore year if they master what is referred to as lower division (9th and 10th grades) core content. Students that choose to leave high school early are prepared to enter the workforce or continue their education at a community college. NCEE has assembled a prestigious Higher Education Advisory Board chaired by the president of the American Council of Education and representatives from participating states to advise on the cut points for English and mathematics. Students should not be required to take remedial courses if they choose to attend a community college. Students not mastering the content by the end of the sophomore year still have the opportunity to master content and retest. Students that choose to stay in high school after mastering the lower division content enroll in one of the upper division board exam programs or take a program in career

and technical education. Most important, all students are held to the same course standards and are motivated to tackle tougher coursework.

NCEE identified the Board Examination providers with curricula that were the best match for the Excellence for All program. One criterion used was alignment to the Common Core Standards. They chose ACT *QualityCore*<sup>®</sup> and the University of Cambridge's International General Certification of Secondary Education (IGCSE) as the lower division curricula and Cambridge's Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) curriculum as the upper division curriculum.

In the fall of 2011, Arizona, Connecticut, Kentucky, and Mississippi became the first states to pilot the program. Corinth, Clarksdale, and Gulfport are the first pilot sites in Mississippi. Corinth and Clarksdale opted to use the Cambridge International General Certification of Secondary Education (IGCSE) curriculum. Gulfport chose the ACT curriculum. In the fall of 2013, two more districts began implementing the Excellence for All program, Lamar County and Columbia.

## Research Design, Procedures, and Results

Interviews were conducted via webinar with groups of teachers, administrators, and counselors from each district. Contacts at each location were asked to invite six to ten administrators, teachers and counselors who are involved in the Excellence for All program in their districts. Contacts from each school were also asked to provide quantifiable data such as:

- Number of students in the program,
- Board exam results,
- Established performance benchmarks used to measure student success, and
- ACT scores and other student performance indicators.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview data are categorized into the strengths and challenges mentioned by each district. Characteristics unique to each pilot implementation are noted.

### Corinth School District

In 2011, Corinth High School enrolled all 9th and 10th graders in the Cambridge curriculum. Corinth teachers and administrators admit that the first year of implementation was a big adjustment for the school, students, and community. However, the success of the program has prompted Corinth to expand the curriculum to the middle school. Currently, all students in 6th - 10th grades are enrolled in IGCSE classes. In the 11th and 12th grades, students can elect to take a Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) class or other advanced courses. Approximately eighty (80) 11th and 12th graders enrolled in at least one AICE class. All students in the 9th and 10th grades take end of course exams in English, history, and science. The math is an integrated, two-year course in which students may take the math test in the 9th or 10th grade. Corinth's goal is for all of their students to reach the college and career ready mark in each of the subjects. That mark, set by the NCEE, is 60% - 70%.

The ACT scores for the 2013 graduating class showed marked improvement over the past five years. In 2013, 30% more Corinth students took the ACT than did in 2009; the

statewide increase was only 3%. Feedback from Corinth administrators attributed the increase at Corinth by the increase of students interested in attending college – students that in the past did not think it possible. It is also worth noting that the average ACT score in 2013 increased in all four ACT sub scores (English, Mathematics, Reading and Science) and the percent of students that met all ACT readiness benchmarks increased by 40% compared to 2009.

In January, three recent graduates of Corinth High school were honored for being the first in Mississippi to earn a Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education. One of the students is currently enrolled in the honors college at Mississippi State University. After completing one semester at MSU, because of dual enrollment in math at Corinth High School, the student has accumulated 25 hours of credit. The other two graduates are enrolled in honors programs at the University of Mississippi. One is in the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program and one is enrolled in the Lott Leadership program.

A three-year summary of student testing figures and the number of teachers that participated in professional development are shown in Table 1. The amount of Excellence for All funds that their district has expended to date is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1. Corinth Testing and Professional Development 2011-2014**

<b>Corinth School District</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>
<b>Number of Students</b>	270	405	530
<b>Number of Cambridge tests given</b>	652	1,029*	NA
<b>Number of tests meeting benchmark</b>	603	990	NA
<b>ACT Average score</b>	20.3	20.4	20.7
<b>Number of Teachers Receiving Training</b>	21	38	61**

\*Includes 27 re-tests from June 2012

\*\*Includes training teachers in Cambridge Secondary 1, feeder courses for IGCSE

**Table 2. Corinth School District Summary of Funds**

<b>Assessments and fees</b>	\$145,057
<b>Professional development</b>	\$ 49,571
<b>Travel</b>	\$ 18,023
<b>Instructional support materials</b>	<u>\$203,958</u>
<b>Expended to Date</b>	\$416,609

## Clarksdale School District

Clarksdale chose to use the Cambridge curriculum. In the fall of 2011, Clarksdale enrolled a cohort of thirty-nine (39) freshmen in the Cambridge IGCSE curriculum. Students who had already scored 20 on the ACT were selected for this first cohort. These students are now in the eleventh grade and are on track to graduate as seniors at the conclusion of school year 2014-2015.

Clarksdale continues to expand the program. As of the 2013-2014 school year, 210 freshmen at the 9th Grade Academy and 22 sophomores and 35 juniors at Clarksdale High School are enrolled in the Cambridge Program. Each year, participating students are given the opportunity to sit for the ACT. The average composite ACT score of participating students is 21, which is higher than the state average and equivalent to the national average.

As one of the first to pilot this program in the U.S., students and teachers are meeting the challenge. All participating teachers have attended intensive professional development. The respondents indicated pride in the fact that they are learning and succeeding in a program that is known throughout the world as being one of the most rigorous and prestigious. Although they have not had any students who have opted to graduate early, they do have several students who have successfully completed multiple exams (History = 22, English = 22, Literature = 2, and Biology = 6).

A three-year summary of student testing figures and the number of teachers that participated in professional development are shown in Table 1. The amount of Excellence for All funds that their district has expended to date is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1. Clarksdale Testing and Professional Development 2011-2014**

<b>Clarksdale School District</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>
<b>Number of Students</b>	39	62	267
<b>Number of Cambridge tests given</b>	206	214	NA
<b>Number of tests meeting benchmark</b>	29	23	NA
<b>ACT Average score</b>	17	19	21
<b>Number of Teachers Receiving Training</b>	4	4	10

**Table 2. Clarksdale School District Summary of Funds**

<b>Assessments and fees</b>	\$21,348
<b>Professional development</b>	\$ 4,107
<b>Travel</b>	\$ 6,183
<b>Instructional support materials</b>	<u>\$ 9,592</u>
<b>Expended to Date</b>	\$41,230
<b>Assessment Allocations for Spring 2014</b>	<u>\$33,170</u>
<b>Total</b>	<u>\$74,400</u>

### **Gulfport School District**

Gulfport's curriculum is based on the ACT college readiness system. Gulfport chose ACT because it is well-known, research-based, and modeled on the skills and knowledge that are taught in rigorous, high-performing high schools in the U.S. Furthermore, teachers and counselors can use ACT's range of assessments and reporting systems to detect and address student learning gaps and ensure students reach their highest potential before graduation.

Since ACT is aligned to the Common Core State Standards, Gulfport decided to completely implement (not phase in) Common Core along with the new ACT curriculum. The teachers attended intense professional development on engaging teaching methods that promote higher order thinking and independent learning. For example, science and math teachers received training on using the Modeling Instruction program developed at Arizona State University. In the fall, all 9th graders were enrolled in the new ACT curriculum course. Currently, there are 431 freshmen, 352 sophomores and 351 juniors in the program. No current seniors participated in the program. Teachers comment that they actually enjoy teaching again because they are seeing results. Collaboration across the curriculum is part of the school's culture and Gulfport teachers report an expectation for holding each other accountable and making sure all teachers are holding the bar high for all students.

Teachers and counselors use the ACT report data to determine the individual needs of students. Focusing on individual growth reveals more than academic problems. During the course of advising students to improve achievement scores, counselors find that some students' academic problems stem from issues such as being bullied or having an eating disorder.

One of the initial challenges Gulfport faced was filling the learning gap between the old curriculum and the more rigorous new curriculum. Gulfport has an ACT team of teachers who work with students to improve scores and they use a district set of formative assessments to support student growth and achievement. Gulfport gives all students the ACT, PLAN, and EXPLORE exams in the 8th and 9th grades, respectively.

In the 10th grade, students take the ACT as their summative assessment. The results are beginning to prove positive. In the class of 2013, which was comprised of students who were not part of the new curriculum, two students scored 30 or higher on the ACT. The class of 2014 has seven students to score at or above 30, and the class of 2015 has 17 students, so far, to score 30 or higher on the ACT. All three classes took the ACT on the same day.

A three-year summary of student testing figures and the number of teachers that participated in professional development are shown in Table 1. The amount of Excellence for All funds that their district has expended to date is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1. Gulfport Testing and Professional Development 2011-2014**

Gulfport School District	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
<b>Number of Students</b>	1,267	1,238	1,134
<b>Number of Students assessed on PLAN</b>	443	456	829
<b>Number of Students assessed on EXPLORE</b>	418	374	NA
<b>Number of Students assessed on ACT</b>	406	408	351
<b>Average ACT score</b>	17.4	18.3	19.98
<b>Number of Teachers Receiving Training</b>	63	74	NA

**Table 2. Gulfport School District Summary of Funds**

<b>Assessments and fees (ACT, Explore, PLAN, Aspire)</b>	\$63,914
<b>Advertising (publish test scores)</b>	\$ 5,312
<b>Instructional support materials (literature and information text)</b>	<u>\$12,489</u>
<b>Expended to Date</b>	\$81,715
<b>Assessment Allocations for Spring 2014 (to be used for A/P testing)</b>	<u>\$ 9,255</u>
<b>Total</b>	\$90,970

### Fall 2013 Pilot

In the fall of 2013, Columbia School District and Lamar County School District began implementing the model using the ACT *QualityCore*<sup>®</sup> (ACTQC) curriculum. They were awarded a total of \$125,000 with \$75,000 allocated for professional development. Since these sites are in the very early implementation stages, the interview questions were adjusted and emailed to school contacts that district superintendents had identified.



Limited feedback is available at this point from these two early pilot projects. School contacts were asked to provide the following:

- Number of students in the program,
- Implementation process (i.e., participating grade levels, professional development, scheduling),
- Responses from school personnel, students, parents, and community and
- Any other information that would benefit the report.

### **Columbia School District**

The ACT QualityCore (ACTQC) Curriculum is being implemented at Columbia High School. They chose ACTQC because they thought it was a positive move towards getting students college and career (CCR) ready. They reported that the ACTQC curriculum and Excellence for All have raised the standards and expectations for teacher and student achievement at their school.

All current 9th and 10th graders entered in the ACTQC/Excellence for All pilot as a cohort group and the district has developed a three-year plan for the full implementation of the ACTQC curriculum. The district restructured the class schedule to accommodate the new curriculum. At this time, they do not have any students who have expressed a desire to use the "Early Exit" diploma; however students are embracing the fact that it will help them do better in more advanced and college classes. District leaders are in the process of analyzing the results of the first round of end-of-course assessments in all ACTQC courses and the data show that their students have performed well. They are currently using the NCEE cut scores as their measurement tool; however, a specific cut score for passing the assessments has not yet been determined. In all the core courses, approximately 50% of the students came within three (3) points of reaching the NCEE cut scores.

The amount of Excellence for All funds that their district has expended to date is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Columbia School District Summary of Funds**

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<b>Assessments and fees</b>	\$ 16,190
<b>Professional development</b>	\$ 56,187
<b>Instructional support materials</b>	<u>\$ 4,823</u>
<b>Expended to Date</b>	\$ 77,200
<b>Assessment Allocations for Spring 2014</b>	<u>\$ 47,800</u>
<b>Total</b>	\$125,000

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## Lamar County School District

Lamar County is implementing the ACTQC curriculum with all 9th and 10th graders in their three high schools; Oak Grove, Sumrall and Purvis. A total of 1000 students are participating in the program. Their ACTQC courses include Algebra I, English I, English II, Biology I, US History, Chemistry and Geometry. Information from Lamar County is still being reviewed.

The amount of Excellence for All funds that their district has expended to date is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Lamar County School District Summary of Funds**

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<b>Assessments and fees</b>	\$ 48,570
<b>Professional development</b>	\$ 56,187
<b>Instructional support materials</b>	<u>\$ 4,823</u>
<b>Expended to Date</b>	\$109,580
<b>Assessment Allocations for Spring 2014</b>	<u>\$ 15,420</u>
<b>Total</b>	<u>\$125,000</u>

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## General Findings and Conclusion

Professional development has played and continues to play a major role in the success of the program. Since Clarksdale and Corinth are implementing the same curriculum, the teachers have attended some professional development sessions together. Teachers expressed the need for more professional development. Although Gulfport is using ACT, their training needs echoed those of Corinth and Clarksdale. Interestingly, the nature of a curriculum modeled after the Board Examination system appears to inspire teachers to be more effective. Teachers commented that preparing for the SATP pressured them to teach students memorization techniques instead of how to be thinkers. Teachers from all three schools admitted that now they are doing a much better job at teaching students how to be deep thinkers. The teachers also view themselves more as facilitators than a “stand and deliver” teacher. Their students work more independently and are taking responsibility for their own learning. Everyone interviewed felt like this system was fair to all students because they are all held to the same high standards. All teachers teach the same curriculum and students take the same tests. Students once viewed as underachievers are motivated to do better.

Respondents reported they felt this model would work in any school district in Mississippi with administrators and teachers who are committed to doing whatever it takes for the students. Culture is a major factor contributing to the success of the program. Teachers need support from administrators and collaboration between all stakeholders is crucial. Constant communication with parents and the community must also take place.

Having the ability to complete all core course work in two years and concentrate on taking courses that align with career and college plans in their junior and senior year seems to be more attractive to students than graduating early. At this point, the districts identified only two students interested in graduating early. Corinth has one student who wants to graduate early to get started on coursework at a community college. Gulfport has one who will graduate early and plans to enter a pre-med program.

At the school level, some of the major challenges have been working with students transferring in and out the districts and coming to agreement with MDE on using scores other than the SATP for the current accountability model. It is also challenging finding ways to bridge the learning gap between the old curriculum and new curriculum. Two of the districts have hired an interventionist to work with students.

Adapting to the rigor of the new curriculum has been a challenge for students and parents alike. Comments suggest that most students have had to learn new note taking and study skills. The GPA of students tends to drop some because the coursework is more demanding. Some respondents have suggested that determining a way to denote this on transcripts would be very beneficial in making comparisons.

Based on the responses, the pilot projects have had a positive impact on the administrators, teachers and students. And based on early results, student achievement as measured by ACT scores is improving. Research of the outcomes of the pilot projects should continue.

### **Next Steps**

The Research and Curriculum Unit is continuing to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from the pilot districts. This interim study provides a brief look at the pilot programs. Another report will be provided at the end of June 2014.