

ACCREDITATION POLICIES OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

1.0 ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

1.1 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION ON SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

The Commission is composed of fifteen (15) members, with three representatives from each of the five Congressional Districts as established at the time the Commission was authorized by MS Code 37-17-3. The membership consists of two classroom teachers, two principals of schools, two school district superintendents, two local school board members, and seven individuals who are not actively engaged in the education profession. All appointments to the Commission shall comply with Section 37-17-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

1.2 APPOINTMENT

Each member of the Commission is appointed by the State Board upon recommendation of the State Superintendent of Education.

1.3 TERMS OF OFFICE

The length of a regular term is four years. Upon acceptance of appointment, each member is eligible to serve for two consecutive terms. If a member changes employment or accepts a position that is no longer reflective of the category for which he or she was appointed, or if a member moves out of the Congressional district he or she was appointed to represent, that member must resign and a new member will be appointed to fill the unexpired term. A member of the Commission who is appointed to fill an unexpired term is eligible for appointment to his or her own term of office.

1.4 GENERAL DUTIES OF COMMISSION

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, shall establish and implement a permanent performance-based accreditation system, and all public elementary and secondary schools shall be accredited under this system. It shall be the purpose of the Commission on School Accreditation to continually review and enforce the standards on accreditation and to make recommendations to the State Board of Education.

1.5 OFFICERS

The Commission annually elects a chairperson and vice-chairperson.

1.6 MEETINGS

The Commission meets on call of the State Superintendent of Education. Any official action taken by the Commission requires the presence of a quorum, which is defined as a majority of the present membership. Superintendents of school districts will receive written notice of the place, time, and date of each Commission meeting. Individuals and/or groups who request a time slot on the agenda are required to submit such in writing to the executive secretary. All requests for agenda consideration must be received by the executive secretary no later than seven days prior to the meeting of the Commission. Agenda items received after this deadline may be added if approved by a majority vote of the Commission.

1.7 EXPENSES

According to Sections 25-3-41 and 25-3-69, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, each member of the Commission is reimbursed for per diem, travel, and other allowable expenses that are incurred when attending meetings of the Commission. The expenses are paid out of any funds available for the operation of the Mississippi Department of Education.

1.8 STAFF

Staff assigned to the Commission consists of personnel in the Mississippi Department of Education. The State Superintendent of Education designates one staff member to serve as executive secretary.

2.0 DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY

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 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 *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*.

2.1 ASSIGNMENT OF DISTRICT ACCREDITATION STATUSES

The Commission on School Accreditation determines the annual accreditation 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, the school board, 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. (See Policy 2.5 for exceptions)

After the Commission takes action on accreditation records presented, the superintendent and the school board of the district 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 section 6.4 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 may not affect the current accreditation status of the district. (See following 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 ACCREDITATION STATUSES

Each public school district will be assigned an annual accreditation status based on compliance with process standards as follows:

ACCREDITED is assigned to a district that complies with 100% of the process standards (See exceptions in Appendices F and H).

ADVISED is assigned to a district that complies with less than 100% of the process standards. The district will be required to develop and implement a corrective action plan to address the deficiencies.

PROBATION is assigned to a district that was assigned an **Advised** status the previous school year and has not taken corrective actions or has not removed the process standard deficiencies that resulted in the Advised status. The district will be required to develop and implement a corrective action plan to address the deficiencies.

WITHDRAWN may be assigned to a district that has previously been assigned a **Probation** status and still does not comply with its corrective action plan and **may/shall** apply to any school district placed in conservatorship. The district will be required to develop and implement a corrective action plan to address the deficiencies.

After a district is assigned an accreditation status, it will maintain that status until the next year when annual accreditation statuses are assigned. Statuses will not be upgraded during the year, but may be downgraded in accordance with Accreditation Policy 2.5. A district's accreditation status also may be affected if one of its schools continues to be designated as a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, or if more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the district are designated as a School At-Risk in any one (1) year. (See policies under section 3.0.)

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. The superintendent is required to provide a written response specifying how and when the violation will be corrected.

2.5 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT AN IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN ACCREDITATION STATUS

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Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2010

An assigned accreditation status may remain unchanged during that school year except in those cases where verified noncompliance with the following accreditation standards may downgrade a status immediately.

- Standards 10 and 11, financial),
- Standard 22, student assessment,
- Standards 35, 36, and 37.1, safe and orderly schools,
- Standard 20, failure to comply with graduation requirements,
- Standards 1 & 3, superintendent-school board relations,
- Standard 2, consistent failure to follow State Board of Education policies,
- Standards 23.1-23.8, continued noncompliance with state/federal regulations, or
- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information.

The district will maintain this accreditation status until annual accreditation statuses are assigned.

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 or more school districts consolidate or when two 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 AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION

2.8.1 CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

When a school district has been assigned an ADVISED, PROBATION, or WITHDRAWN accreditation status, the Mississippi Department of Education, in conjunction with the school district, shall develop a corrective action plan that includes a time frame in which to correct the district's deficiencies. The State Board of Education implements the program of development in each district assigned an ADVISED or PROBATION status in accordance with Section 37-17-6(10) (a)-(e), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

The school district is required to submit a corrective action plan to the State Board of Education within sixty (60) days. 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. After the plan is approved by the State Board of Education, written notice will be sent to school district officials. 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, the school district is subject to having its accredited status withdrawn by the

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Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2010

Commission on School Accreditation. Upon declaration of a state of emergency by the Governor, the State Board of Education may take all such action for dealing with school districts as is authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Section 37-17-6, including the appointment of an interim conservator. If the accreditation of the school district is withdrawn, the status of the district will be listed as WITHDRAWN NOT ACCREDITED, and the record of that district will continue to be maintained.

2.8.2.1 HEARINGS

Before recommending that the State Board of Education withdraw the accredited status of a district, the Commission conducts a hearing to allow the officials of the affected district to present evidence or other reasons as to why the accredited status should not be withdrawn. All hearings before the Commission are recorded and transcribed. {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, the Commission determines whether the accredited status of the district should be withdrawn. If the decision is made not to withdraw the accredited status of the district, a new timeline is established, contingent on approval by the State Board of Education. If the decision is made to withdraw the accredited status of the district, the State Board of Education reviews the record of the hearing and determines whether or not to approve the decision of the Commission. If the decision to withdraw accreditation is upheld by the State Board of Education, the Commission issues 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.

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 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

Before a school district is reinstated as an accredited school district, the district will be visited by a committee appointed by the Commission.

3.0 PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATION POLICY

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the individual public school level and district level. Individual schools and districts are held accountable for student growth and performance and receive an annual School Performance Classification and District Performance Classification. (See Glossary for definitions of an attendance center and school.)

When the district establishes a new school and/or the district reconfigures the specific grades or students assigned to an existing school(s) within the district, the student achievement data used to assign school performance classifications will follow the guidelines established in the School Performance Standards and School Performance Model.

3.1 ASSIGNMENT OF PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS

3.1.1 School Performance Classification

Information concerning school performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school that has both achievement and growth data will be assigned an annual performance classification. In addition, the Graduation Rate and the High School Completion Index (HSCI) will be included in determining the performance classification of schools with any grade configuration of 9-12. Available assessment data will be reported for those schools that do not have both achievement and growth data, but a school performance classification will not be assigned. An alternative school will not be assigned a school performance classification. (See State Board Policy 901 and 902 and the Glossary for definition of alternative school.)

3.1.2 District Performance Classification

Information concerning district performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school district will be assigned an annual performance classification based on achievement, growth, and graduation rate or High School Completion Index. A district performance level is assigned based on the performance of all students in the district (i.e., the district will be treated as one K-12 school).

3.2 PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Performance (output or product) standards address selected components of the statewide testing program and other outcome measures related to the performance of a school. (See Performance Standards pages 34-41.) The State Board of Education may also take into account such factors as graduation rates, dropout rates, completion rates, the extent to which the school or district employs qualified teachers in every classroom, and any other factors deemed appropriate by the State Board of Education.

3.3 PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS

The performance classification assigned to a school or district will be determined by (a) the percentage of students who are performing at criterion levels (minimum, basic, proficient, and advanced) and (b) the degree to which student performance has improved over time (based on an expected growth value for the school). The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign performance classification as follows:

Star School
High Performing
Successful
Academic Watch
Low-Performing School
At-Risk of Failing
Failing

(See State Accountability Rating System, page 33 and Performance Classification Model, Page 34)

A school will not receive a school performance classification if the test data have been invalidated, and the school performance classification will be noted as Test Data Invalidated. If a testing irregularity has been verified, the Office of Student Assessment may recommend to the Commission on School Accreditation that the school's annual performance classification include the label School in Violation of Test Security. (See Appendix F.)

3.4 SCHOOLS AT-RISK

Following an analysis of school data each year, the Mississippi Department of Education shall identify those schools that are deficient in educating students and are in need of improvement in accordance with Section 37-18-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. This analysis shall indicate individual school performance in two areas: (a) meeting its assigned yearly growth expectation and (b) percentage of the students in the school that are proficient.

3.4.1 DESIGNATION

A school shall be identified as a School At-Risk and in need of assistance if the school:

- (a) does not meet its growth expectation and has a percentage of students functioning below grade level, as designated by the State Board of Education;
- (b) is designated as a Failing School; or
- (c) is designated as At-Risk of Failing or Low Performing for two (2) consecutive years.

3.4.2 NOTIFICATION

Within fifteen (15) days after a School At-Risk has been identified, written notice shall be sent by the State Board of Education by certified mail to the school principal, the superintendent, and the chairperson of the local board of education.

3.4.3 EVALUATION TEAMS AND EVALUATION REPORT

Within fifteen (15) days after notification, the State Board of Education shall assign an evaluation team to the school. The evaluation team shall be independent of the school being evaluated and may include employees of the State Department of Education. The team may include retired educators who have met certain standards and have completed all necessary training.

The evaluation team shall analyze the School At-Risk's data to determine probable areas of weakness before conducting an on-site audit. After completing the evaluation of the School At-Risk, the team shall prepare and adopt its school evaluation report, which shall be submitted to the State Superintendent of Education for approval within forty-five (45) calendar days. The evaluation report shall identify any personnel who were found by the evaluation team to be in need of improvement and need to participate in a professional development plan. Evaluation instruments used to evaluate teachers, principals, superintendents or any other certified or classified personnel will be instruments that have been validated for such purposes.

Following the State Superintendent's approval of the report, a representative of the department of education and the evaluation team leader shall present the report to the

principal of the School At-Risk, the school district superintendent, and school board members of the local school district. Following this presentation, the evaluation report shall be presented to the community served by the School At-Risk at an advertised public meeting.

3.4.4 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Based on the findings of the evaluation report and the results of the public meeting, the Mississippi Department of Education and evaluation team leader shall assist the school principal and other local school officials in the development of a school improvement plan. A local parents/citizens advisory council shall be established by the evaluation team at the school to provide input and guidance into the development of the school improvement plan and its evaluation. The local parents/citizens advisory council shall consist of representatives from each of the following local groups: (a) five (5) representatives of the local PTA, PTSA, or other parent organization, (b) two (2) local elected officials or community activists, (c) two (2) students, (d) two (2) local business leaders. Persons who are employed by the local school district are not eligible for membership on the parents/citizens advisory council. The school improvement plan shall be developed and approved by the principal of the School At-Risk, the superintendent of the local school district, the local school board, and a majority of the teachers of the school. If the plan is not approved, the State Board of Education may approve and implement the plan in the school.

3.4.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR EDUCATORS

As part of the school improvement plan for a School At-Risk, a professional development plan shall be prepared for those school administrators, teachers, or other employees who are identified by the evaluation team as needing improvement. The plan shall be prepared and implemented in accordance with Section 37-18-7, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

3.4.5.1 Teachers

A teacher deemed in need of professional development by the evaluation team shall be required to participate in a professional development plan. The plan will provide professional training and will be based on each teacher's specific needs and teaching assignments. The teacher's full participation in the professional development plan shall be required. This process shall be followed by a performance-based evaluation, which shall monitor the teacher's teaching skills and teaching behavior over a period of time. This monitoring shall include announced and unannounced reviews. Additionally, a teacher may be assigned a mentor who has demonstrated expertise as a high-performing teacher.

If, after one (1) year, the teacher fails to perform, the local administration shall reevaluate the teacher's professional development plan, make any necessary adjustments to it, and require participation in the plan for a second year. If, after the second year, the teacher fails to perform, the administration shall recommend, and the local school board shall dismiss the teacher in a manner consistent with Section 37-9-59, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

3.4.5.2 Principals

If a principal is deemed to be in need of improvement by the evaluation team, a professional development plan shall be developed for the principal, and the principal's full participation in the professional development plan shall be a condition of continued employment. The plan shall provide professional training in the roles and

behaviors of an instructional leader and shall offer training specifically identified for that principal's needs. The principal of a School At-Risk may be assigned mentors who have demonstrated expertise as high performing-principals. The local school administration shall continue to monitor and evaluate all school personnel during this period, evaluate their professional development plans, and make personnel decisions as appropriate.

At the end of the second year, if a school continues to be a School At-Risk and a principal has been at that school for three (3) or more years, the administration shall recommend and the local school board shall dismiss the principal in a manner consistent with Section 37-9-59, and the State Board of Education may initiate the school district conservatorship process authorized under Section 37-17-6. If extenuating circumstances exist, such as the assignment of a principal at a School At-Risk for fewer than two (2) years, other options may be considered, subject to approval by the State Board of Education.

3.4.5.3 Superintendent

If the evaluation report reveals a school district central office problem, the superintendent of the school district having a School At-Risk shall be required to participate in a professional development plan. Additionally, the superintendent may be assigned mentors who are high-performing superintendents and have demonstrated expertise and knowledge of high-performing schools. The local school board will continue to evaluate the performance of the superintendent, including participation in a professional development plan, and make appropriate revisions to the plan as needed.

If a school continues to be a School At-Risk after a second year, the local school board may (a) impose a cap on the superintendent's salary or (b) make any necessary adjustments to his professional development plan and require continued participation in that plan.

If a school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, the State Board of Education shall issue a written request with documentation to the Governor asking that the office of the superintendent of such school district is subject to recall, or if more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk in any one year, the State Board of Education may issue a written request with documentation to the Governor asking that the office of the superintendent of such school district is subject to recall. Upon declaration by the Governor, an elected superintendent shall stand for re-election, and an appointed superintendent shall stand for re-appointment as specified in Section 37-18-7(4)(c), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

3.4.5.4 Central Office Administrators

If the evaluation report reveals a school district central office problem, the central office administrator of the school district having a School At-Risk shall be required to participate in a professional development plan. Additionally, the administrator may be

Draft Revisions to the Accreditation Policies published in the
Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2010

assigned mentors who are high-performing administrators and have demonstrated expertise and knowledge of high-performing schools. The local school board will continue to evaluate the performance of the administrator, including participation in a professional development plan, and make appropriate revisions to that plan as needed.

If a school continues to be a School At-Risk after a second year, the local school board may (a) impose a cap on the administrator's salary or (b) make any necessary adjustments to the professional development plan and require continued participation in that plan.

At the end of the second year, if a school continues to be a School At-Risk and the administrator has been at that school for three (3) or more years, the superintendent shall recommend and the local school board shall dismiss the administrator in a manner consistent with Section 37-9-59, and the State Board of Education may initiate the school district conservatorship process authorized under Section 37-17-6. If extenuating circumstances exist, such as the assignment of an administrator for fewer than two (2) years, other options may be considered, subject to approval by the State Board of Education.

3.4.5.5 School Board

If a school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, the State Board of Education shall, or in the event that more than fifty (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk, in any one (1) year the State Board of Education may, issue a written request with documentation to the Governor that the membership of the school board of such school district shall be subject to recall. Whenever the Governor declares that the membership of the school board shall be subject to recall, the county election commission or the local governing authorities, as the case may be, shall take action as specified in Section 37-18-7(5), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

3.4.6 CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCY STATUS

In the event 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, the State Board of Education may request that the Governor declare a state of emergency in that school district. 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 district as is authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Section 37-17-6, including the appointment of an interim conservator. {MS Code 37-18-7(6)}

If 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, or when a school district meets the State Board of Education's definition of a failing school district for two (2) consecutive full school years, the State Board of Education may request the Governor to declare a state of emergency in that school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. 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 failure to meet minimum academic standards, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor student performance.

4.0 RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

The State Board of Education shall provide special recognition and/or rewards to individual schools or school districts meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards as defined by the State Board of Education. A school or district with a QDI in the top two ranges will be identified as meeting the highest level of accreditation standards.

4.1 RECOGNITION

Special recognition will be provided to all schools meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards. Examples of recognition include, but are not limited to the following:

- Public announcements and events;
- Special recognition of student progress and effort;
- Certificates of recognition and plaques for teachers, principals, superintendents, support and classified personnel and parents; and
- Media announcements utilizing the services of the Mississippi Educational Television.

4.2 REWARDS

Rewards may be provided for schools and school districts assigned the highest levels of performance as defined by the State Board of Education as follows:

4.2.1 Exemptions for Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.

Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the process standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Library Media/Organized Collection (Standard 24.1)
- Library Media Program of Service (Standard 24.2)
- High School Science Laboratory (Standard 25)
- Limit on Course Preparations (Standard 31)
- Student Teacher Ratios in Grades 1-4 (Standard 34.2)
- Limit of 150 Students Per Teacher in Academic Core Subjects (Standard 34.5)

4.2.2 Exemptions for Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.

School districts assigned the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the process standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Community Involvement, Parental Communication, and Business Partnerships (Standard 18)
- Senior Preparation for Graduation Ceremonies (Standard 19.5)
- Summer School Program Requirements (Standard 19.6)
- Professional Development Plan/Program (Standard 21)
- Early Childhood Programs (kindergarten and teacher assistant) (Standard 23.1)
- Instructional Management System (Standard 27.1)
- Suggested Teaching Strategies, Resources, and Assessment Strategies (Standard 27.2)

4.2.3 Financial Rewards

If funds are appropriated by the legislature, Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may apply to the State Board of Education for monetary incentives to be used for selected school needs, as identified by a vote of all licensed and instructional personnel employed at the school. These incentive funds may be used for specific needs, including, but not limited to the following:

- Funding for professional development activities; staff participating in such activities will report to the school and school district about the benefits and lessons learned from such training;
- Technology needs;
- Sabbaticals for teachers or administrators, or both, to pursue additional professional development or educational enrichment;
- Paid professional leave; and
- Training for parents, including, but not limited to, curriculum, Title I, special need students, student rights and responsibility, school and community relations, and effective parenting.

5.0 ACCREDITATION MONITORING PROCEDURES

Staff in the Mississippi Department of Education continuously monitor school districts to verify compliance with applicable accreditation requirements and state and federal laws.

5.1 ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation has the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the superintendent is notified in writing and given thirty (30) days from the receipt of notification to provide a written response. The report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation.

5.2 INVESTIGATIVE EVALUATIONS (COMPLAINTS AGAINST DISTRICTS)

All formal complaints made against schools or districts must be submitted to the Office of Accreditation in writing and bear the signature of the individual(s) filing the complaint. The written complaint shall contain specific details concerning alleged violations.

5.2.1 AREAS OVER WHICH THE COMMISSION HAS NO AUTHORITY

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission has no authority, the individual filing the complaint is notified, and the complaint will be placed on file in the Office of Accreditation.

5.2.2 AREAS OVER WHICH THE COMMISSION DOES HAVE AUTHORITY

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission does have authority, the superintendent will be notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and given 30 days to provide a written response to the allegations and present documentation of compliance. The superintendent is also notified that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

Draft Revisions to the Accreditation Policies published in the
Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2010

5.2.1.1 If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, a report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation, and the complainant will be notified of the findings.

5.2.1.2 If no deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the district and the complainant will be notified.

5.2.3 UNANNOUNCED ON-SITE INVESTIGATIVE EVALUATION

The State Superintendent of Education has the authority to call for an immediate unannounced on-site investigative evaluation of a school district. Procedures for conducting an on-site investigative evaluation are as follows:

5.2.3.1 The auditor(s) may arrive in the district without prior notification.

5.2.3.2 The auditor(s) inform the superintendent of the purpose of the investigative evaluation and of the procedures to be followed.

5.2.3.3 The auditor(s) discuss procedures with the principal of the school if appropriate.

5.2.3.4 The auditor(s) use various methods to collect the data needed to verify or discredit the complaint, including examination of official records, interviews with school personnel, and observations.

5.2.3.5 Upon completion of the investigative evaluation, the auditor(s) compile a written report that is sent to the superintendent, the school board, and the Commission within 30 days of completion of the evaluation.

5.3 SPECIAL TEST AUDITS

Reports regarding potential testing irregularities or test security violations are referred to the Office of Student Assessment. Such reports include statistical analyses of test data conducted after each test administration, self-reported incidents, third-party allegations regarding violations of testing requirements, and irregularities noted during test security audits. Regular test security audits may be conducted prior to, during, and following each test administration in order to promote the integrity and security of the Mississippi Assessment System. The Office of Student Assessment will report to the Office of Accreditation each testing irregularity that has been verified as a violation of a testing requirement.

5.3.1 Self-reports or third-party allegations regarding testing irregularities may be either formal written reports (signed or unsigned) or verbal reports or complaints that may be made officially or anonymously and with or without documentary evidence.

5.3.2 If a third-party allegation addresses an area over which the State Board of Education has no authority, the individual filing the allegation will be notified.

5.3.3 A self-report or allegation must identify specific details concerning alleged violations of test security and/or testing irregularities in order to warrant an investigative audit.

5.3.4 Any statistical analysis that indicates a potential testing irregularity or test security violation will be reviewed and evaluated by staff in the Office of Student Assessment. If the review and evaluation of the statistical analysis indicate that further information is required in order to resolve or confirm the testing irregularity, the Office of Student Assessment may require that a school district investigate the potential irregularity and report its findings to the Office of Student Assessment. Any verified testing irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.

5.3.5 Procedures for test security audits are as follows:

5.3.5.1 The auditor may arrive at the school without prior notification.

5.3.5.2 The auditor informs the school administrator of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.

5.3.5.3 The auditor requests that the superintendent be notified that a test audit is in progress.

5.3.5.4 The auditor uses the same methods to collect data as described in policy.

5.3.5.5 The auditor reports the audit findings to the Office of Student Assessment. If the audit findings indicate that a testing irregularity has occurred, the Office of Student Assessment will notify the district superintendent. If the response from the superintendent does not resolve the irregularity, the irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.

5.4 SUMMER PROGRAM AUDITS

Each school district providing educational programs during the summer is required to report summer program data, including types of instructional programs provided, staffing, and enrollment. School districts offering summer programs may be audited to verify information contained in the annual Summer School/Extended Year Report.

5.5 OTHER STATE/FEDERAL PROGRAM AUDITS/EVALUATIONS

When audits or evaluations of other state or federal programs reveal verified noncompliance with state or federal program regulations, the incidents of noncompliance are filed with the Office of Accreditation.

5.6 ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION OF ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

Accreditation staff in the Mississippi Department of Education review annual personnel/accreditation information and other annual reports submitted by school districts. Staff will analyze and compare this information with any other accreditation data on record and notify responsible officials of any inconsistency in reporting or any apparent deficiency in meeting standards. Any information submitted by a school district may be verified through on-site visits. Upon request the school district must provide documentation necessary to validate compliance with accreditation requirements.

6.0 HEARING AND APPEAL PROCEDURES

All controversies involving the accreditation of schools or school districts are initially heard by a duly authorized representative of the Commission before whom a complete record is made.

6.1 *REQUEST FOR HEARING*

The school board of a school district may request a hearing by filing written notice with the executive secretary of the Commission on School Accreditation within ten (10) calendar days of the written notification of the recommended Commission action.

6.2 *AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMISSION*

Upon receipt of the written request for hearing, the chairman of the Commission assigns, in writing, a duly authorized representative previously appointed by the Commission to hear the controversy.

6.3 *HEARING PROCEDURES*

6.3.1 The Commission's representative sets the time, place, and date for a hearing and notifies all parties of the time, place, and date of the hearing by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested. All parties may be represented by counsel at the expense of the party. The hearing is conducted in such a manner as to afford all parties a fair and reasonable opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence pertinent to the issues and to cross-examine witnesses presented by the opposing party. The Commission's representative may permit any portion of the evidence to be submitted in the form of depositions or affidavits; and in case affidavits are received, an opportunity to present counter-affidavits is provided.

6.3.2 It is the responsibility of each party at the hearing to secure the attendance of such witness or witnesses as the party deems necessary or appropriate, and any expense connected with the attendance of such witnesses is borne by the party responsible for the attendance of the witness.

6.3.3 In conducting the hearing, the Commission's representative is not bound by common law or by statutory rules of evidence or by technical or formal rules of procedure, provided, however, hearsay evidence, if admitted, is not the sole basis for the determination of facts by the Commission's representative.

6.3.4 After presentation by the executive secretary of the Commission regarding recommended action and policy in support thereof, the party filing the written notice of hearing has the burden of going forward with the evidence, and at the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission's representative grants any party the opportunity to present a statement in such party's own behalf, either in person or by such party's attorney.

6.3.5 All hearings held before the Commission's representative are recorded and transcribed by a court reporter whose fees and costs of transcription are paid by the school district involved within forty-five (45) days after having been notified of such costs and fees by the Commission. Within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the transcribed record of the hearing, the Commission's representative files a written recommendation to the Commission as to the resolution of the controversies. Upon consideration of the transcribed record and recommendation of its representative, the Commission makes its decision and notifies all parties in writing by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested. The decision of the Commission is final unless the school board of the school district involved elects to appeal to the State Board of Education. The school board of the school district may appeal to the State Board of Education by filing a written notice of appeal with the State Superintendent of Education within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of the decision of the Commission on School Accreditation.

6.4 *APPEAL PROCEDURES*

6.4.1 An appeal to the State Board of Education is on the record previously made before the Commission's representative or the Commission. Upon written application, the State Board of Education may consider new factual evidence.

6.4.2 Upon receipt of the transcript, the State Board of Education, through the State Superintendent of Education, notifies the parties involved that the transcript has been filed and that the appealing party has fifteen (15) calendar days to file any written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. The Commission is allowed thirty (30) calendar days from the filing of the transcript with the State Board of Education to file a responsive written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. Any written argument in rebuttal by the appealing party must be filed within forty (40) calendar days of the filing of the transcript. The appealing party may not exceed twenty-five (25) pages as the combined total for its original and rebuttal arguments. An original and nine (9) copies of the written argument must be provided. The State Board of Education considers all appeals within thirty (30) calendar days of the last written argument filed. The written decision of the State Board of Education is transmitted to the parties involved within fifteen (15) calendar days of its decision.

7.0 ANNUAL REPORT

Each local school district shall be required to develop and publish an annual report as prescribed by the State Board of Education. By November 1 of each year, as prescribed by the State Board of Education, the report shall be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the county and posted on the school district's web site in a printable format. The public notice shall include information on the report's availability on the district's web site, with the web site address, and the location(s) in the school district where a copy of the report can be obtained. {MS Code (37-17-6(9)(a)}.