

Policy and Legislative Recommendations By the Task Force To Study Underperforming Schools and School Districts

The Task Force on Underperforming Schools and School Districts recommends that:

Accountability

1. The Legislature mandate that each local school district provide an annual report card to inform the public of its most significant data and shall mandate the method in which the report is to be published in the local newspaper. The State Board of Education shall prescribe the contents and timing of the report. Additional in-depth information can be posted on the district's website.
2. The State Board of Education define underperforming schools and districts and include the following possible factors in such definition: student assessment data to include both absolute achievement and meeting growth expectation, graduation rate, dropout rate, completion rate, number of emergency teacher certificates, and any other information pertinent to school performance.
3. The Mississippi Department of Education develop a process for early intervention and assistance to a district or school when it is in danger of being designated as underperforming.
4. The Legislature give the Mississippi Department of Education the ability and necessary funding to address school districts that have violated accreditation standards at probation level or school districts that have been defined by the State Board of Education as an at-risk school district due to lack of improvement in student achievement. Through statute or State Board policy, the Department should:
 - Require that school districts meeting either of these criteria implement certain instructional strategies, implement professional development for teachers and leaders, and require building a School Improvement Plan, and
 - Monitor implementation of the School Improvement Plan.Failure of a district to comply with this directive would lead to immediate takeover by the Mississippi Department of Education.
5. The Legislature include the removal of school board members in underperforming school districts in the same manner as superintendents of underperforming districts and schools, as passed in Senate Bill 2149 during the 2008 Regular Session. Such change would recognize that boards act as a single entity, not five individuals. However, an appeals process would allow individuals to appeal the decision, similar to the process outlined for superintendents in Senate Bill 2149.
6. The Legislature mandate that the superintendent in a district with one or more underperforming schools must annually complete the 6-hour course entitled "Improving Student Outcomes and Academic Success" with his/her school board members and the superintendent in a district with a serious financial condition must attend the 6-hour course entitled "Effective Financial Management in Local School Districts" with his/her school board members. School board members in

these specific districts are already required to complete this training provided by the Mississippi School Boards Association, but the Task Force believes it is important for the superintendent to also participate in the training with board members.

7. The Task Force does not recommend a change to the current requirements for an individual to qualify for the office of school board member, based on the following:
 - No other locally elected official is required to have more educational requirements.
 - A survey conducted by the Mississippi School Boards Association in 2007 determined that Mississippi's standards are comparable with the rest of the nation.

Consolidation

The Legislature study the value of school district consolidation, to include cost savings, impact on underperforming schools, and possible incentives that could be made available to districts. The study should also review any needed collaboration of services among districts, such as sharing of teachers who teach critical shortage subjects.

Funding/Finance

1. The Legislature provide additional contractual dollars to the Mississippi Department of Education for Turnaround/School Improvement Teams that assist districts in an early intervention process.
2. The Legislature consider a law requiring the state auditor to complete audits on districts every 4 years or name the firm to complete the audit. However, no firm shall audit a district for more than 3 consecutive years.
3. The Legislature establish a revolving building account that districts can borrow against and repay over a five- to seven-year period. The Mississippi Department of Education should establish controls necessary to ensure proper use of the funds.

Principals

The Legislature direct the Mississippi Department of Education to study and define incentives and consequences for principals to improve student performance in underperforming schools.

School Board Members

1. The Legislature include the removal of school board members in underperforming school districts in the same manner as superintendents of underperforming districts and schools, as passed in Senate Bill 2149 during the 2008 Regular Session.
2. The House Apportionment and Elections Committee and the Senate Elections Committee examine the benefits and disadvantages of having those school board members who are elected during the first Saturday of March to be elected during

the general election. In addition, these committees should consider requiring a run-off election of a county school board position when a single candidate does not receive a majority of the votes cast.

Superintendents

1. The Legislature mandate the termination of the contract of a superintendent upon takeover of his/her district by the state.
2. The State Board of Education develop the training and process for requiring and issuing a superintendent's license. The training could be offered either prior to or following appointment or election to the position, mandating a specific period of time for successful completion of the training.
3. The Legislature give superintendents complete hiring authority with budget limits set by the local school board.

Teachers

1. The Legislature consider final recommendations regarding teacher licensure requirements from the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Preparation established in 2006.
2. The Legislature provide funds to the Mississippi Department of Education to build a National/International Teacher Recruitment effort in Mississippi.
3. The Legislature provide resources to the Mississippi Department of Education to thoroughly evaluate the current Critical Teacher Shortage Act.

Takeover Regulations

The Legislature establish the Mississippi Recovery School District, which will have a superintendent to oversee all local districts under conservatorship and will result in long-term governance. A district under conservatorship should result in abolishing such district and should be temporarily exempt from Education Employment Procedures Law.

Community Involvement

The Legislature require the establishment of a community-based P-16 (Pre-Kindergarten through higher education) council either by every school district or one per county to provide advice, training and support. The council should represent a broad spectrum of the community, including economic developers, elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, faith-based leaders, social services, non-profit organizations, school attendance officers, law enforcement officials, health department officials, day care providers, librarians, parents and anyone else with the knowledge and resources that can be leveraged to build stronger P-16 communities. The council should be appointed in a number of ways and should not be appointed solely by the local school board. It would be a community-led group that is inclusive and transparent, learns to make data-driven decisions, has shared accountability for results, and is required to publicly report progress to the community as a whole.

Continuation of Task Force

1. The Legislature consider continuing the work of the Task Force in order to monitor underperforming school districts and to continue making recommendations for improvements.