

## MISSISSIPPI



***Adopted Common Core  
State Standards in 2010***

***Adopted updated  
Mississippi College and  
Career Ready Standards  
in January 2016***

### Mississippi School Demographics

Total #Schools	1074	
Total #Students	492,586	
Total #Black Students	242,946	49%
Total #Hispanic Students	14,345	3%
Total #Asian/Pac Islander	5,033	1%
Total #Two or More Races	5,639	1%
Total #White Students	223,607	45%
Total #Free and Reduced Lunch	355,484	72%
Total #ELL	6,574	1%
Total #Students with Disabilities	65,513	13%

The Mississippi Department of Education (The Department) began implementing the higher Common Core State Standards soon after the original adoption in 2010. Last year's 4<sup>th</sup> graders are the first group of students that have been working with the higher learning standards since 1<sup>st</sup> grade. State Superintendent Carey Wright says she's excited to see the dedication to new standards paying off in improved student outcomes, citing improving scores on The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), where Mississippi was the only state in the nation that showed significant improvement in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math. The state increased in 4<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency by 5 percentage points to 26 percent proficient, and by 4 percentage points in reading to 30 percent proficient.

Soon after Mississippi adopted its new college- and career-ready standards in 2010, they worked with partners from higher education, the business community, and elected officials to begin implementing the standards and delivering professional development. As the Department began the task of implementation, they had to take a hard look at how they delivered professional development and the agency structure itself.

In 2010, The Department started blanketing the state with teams from school districts and universities working to implement train-the-trainer models. The train-the-trainer model served well to promote general awareness, but over a period of three years, they found that actual implementation varied from district to district in terms of getting information into the hands of teachers and unpacking the standards. Some districts simply didn't have the capacity to provide their staff with what was needed in terms of making the standards come alive in the classroom. Through the interaction with teachers and the realization that some districts and teachers needed more in depth training, the state changed the model, moving to an agency delivered face-to-face training model.

Now the Department provides statewide training with a regional approach delivered through the six Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs). This effort allows the Department to branch out and have a more direct touch to classroom teachers and principals. The feedback they have received is that this regional, face-to-face approach is working better and the field wants more of it. The RESAs provide training to over 20,000 educators each year.

Building on the success of the regional approach, The Department has partnered with the University of Mississippi to continue to think outside the box. A \$2.6 million contract paid for by a combination of state and federal funds calls for the University of Mississippi to hire individuals as Professional Development Coordinators who are in service



to the Department and provide on demand training to the districts in areas such as early literacy, mathematics, English Language Arts, and other content areas. A local superintendent or principal can call and request specific training for staff that is then provided by the Professional Development Coordinators hired through this partnership. This approach allows the Department to have control over the content and ensures that everyone trained through this model gets the same information. This professional development delivery strategy has resulted in 161 sessions in 45 districts just since July 1, 2015.

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**Mississippi officials say an important lesson learned during implementation of the standards is to listen closely to stakeholders.**

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Implementing the standards has also caused the Department to look inward, at its very own structure. A capacity review of the Department provided an opportunity to receive feedback and put infrastructure in place to bring about a culture change within the agency. Previously, many people at the Department did not have a strong content area background. Their focus now is to bring in new employees with building level skillsets, hiring individuals who have strong content area expertise.

Like many states, Mississippi began receiving questions from stakeholders regarding new college- and career-readiness standards. To address this need, education leaders across Mississippi joined forces to improve academic content standards. Based on stakeholder feedback, they began a review of the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards in English Language Arts and mathematics with a desire to better engage the public, and provide a clearer understanding of just what standards are and how they are used in the classroom.

Mississippi put the standards on the agency's website for the entire state to review. Instead of the normal 30-day process for public comment, the standards went out for a 90-day public comment period. At the end of the 90-days, more than 90 percent of the people that provided feedback on the standards actually approved of them. Not a single person said to remove anything from the standards, but rather called for rewriting specific areas or moving items from one grade level to another.

Once the Department received feedback on the standards, they called in 60 of the best and brightest teachers in Mississippi to advise the Department on specific changes received through the public feedback. After two months of review and modifications by the Department and the team of local curriculum specialists, the revised standards went to the Mississippi State Board of Education for another round of public comments, with the Board eventually approving the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards in January of 2016.

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Mississippi officials say an important lesson learned during implementation of the standards is to listen closely to stakeholders. The feedback they received has helped them improve their professional development, moving to a regional, face-to-face method in partnership with regional offices that has been lauded by the field. They also learned that to improve student outcomes, everyone — teachers, principals and superintendents — needs to be trained in what works. An innovative partnership with the University of Mississippi allows them to provide specialized trainings to districts that allows for content and training to be consistent across the state.



## MISSISSIPPI- DISTRICT



### *Booneville School District*

#### Booneville School District

Rural

K-12 District

3 Schools

1,300 Students

55% Free and Reduced Lunch

Todd English, superintendent of the Booneville School District says in his district the biggest challenge to implement the standards was society. He says some parents weren't supportive of the new standards because kids have to work harder than under the previous standards. Moving to college- and career-ready standards from the old Mississippi learning standards was a big jump, for teachers, administrators, and parents.

When the Common Core State Standards were initially implemented he knew there would be pushback, so he went to any church, club, or community meeting that would listen to him speak about the new standards. He talked about the need for Booneville students to be able to compete in a global marketplace. He argued that Booneville had to get behind the new more rigorous standards because if they didn't they would continue to fall further behind the nation, and the nation would fall further behind the world.

The Booneville School administration sold the community on a vision — more rigorous

standards are needed for their sons or daughters to be successful. The world and the technology that drives it are rapidly changing; the top jobs in 10 years have probably not even been created. Students must get that foundation now, to have success early on.

One of the keys to getting the standards right has been the professional development teachers in his district received from the Mississippi Department of Education (the Department). The face-to-face training the Department provides was effective because the individuals who provided it worked previously with district personnel and had instant credibility. They communicated with the district directly and knew its strengths and weaknesses. The Department math and ELA specialists worked directly with the Booneville curriculum specialist to tailor training and develop an implementation plan for the district.

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While the data was a starting point, Booneville teachers say the training was phenomenal. There were 30 teachers in each session. They got to work with each other and were comfortable asking questions. Before the Department teams got to the district, relationships were already in place and the district's teachers were ready to learn. Professional training from the state has been a key to successful local implementation, "At the end of the day, when the door closes, the quality of the teacher in that room determines the implementation quality of the standards," said English.



English says the best part of implementing the revised Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards is seeing his kids achieve at a whole new level. In Booneville, they are seeing the growth of the middle ranges of students, those learners who may not have been challenged by the previous standards. English says it's exciting to see students go from being bored in school under the previous set of standards, to being challenged now and that their only limitation may be their age. But it can cut both ways. There are students who were earning straight As under the old standards, that are now receiving Bs. That can be a tough conversation to have with parents, but it's important because in Booneville they're convinced those students are learning so much more now and will have a much brighter future because of the change.



## MISSISSIPPI- DISTRICT



### *Monroe County Schools*

#### Monroe County Schools

Rural

K-12 District

3 Schools

2,400 Students

63% Free and Reduced Lunch

Scott Cantrell is the Superintendent in Monroe County, a 2,400 student district with three K-12 campuses. The biggest challenge the district had in switching to the new Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards has been logistical. Just trying to find time for teachers to familiarize themselves with the standards, scheduling professional development days, and covering classes so educators can work together and develop plans for making the standards come alive in the classroom.

In Monroe County just making sure everyone was on the same page was a challenge, but one that they met head on. In the beginning, the administration approached staff, showing them the difference between the previous standards and Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards and assuring them it was the right direction to be moving in for the students of the district. They encouraged staff to embrace the new standards. Getting staff buy-in was not an easy task, but the administration continued to reinforce and reassure this was the direction the district was heading and staff would be supported.

Assistant Superintendent Brian Jernigan says the shift in how the state delivers professional development in Mississippi has been a welcome change. The old train-the-trainer method worked to an extent, but it took too much time away from the classroom and the training didn't always trickle down to other educators as it was intended.

Over the past two years Monroe County Schools have been utilizing the state's menu of services to provide professional development on-site and specific to Monroe County. Having the Department staff come to the district gives extra weight to the professional development. Not only is the state measuring the performance of the district, they're also working with them to provide guidance to implement the standards.

The relationship between Monroe County Schools and the Department has changed as they have worked together to implement the new standards, "They have been very supportive and they want districts to succeed, understand and be comfortable with the standards," said Jernigan. "They have really made a deliberate attempt to offer more and we are a lot further now with the support services we receive from them than we have ever been."

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Jernigan and Cantrell say communicating with classroom teachers is the key to success. They say it's important to provide resources and information, but that so much has been developed to help classroom teachers make the switch to college- and career-ready standards, it



can be overwhelming. One of the tools they say has helped their teachers make the transition is an essential document binder with no more than five documents that a teacher can focus on to help them narrow their efforts to build lesson plans. If they need more detail, it can always be found, but getting to the baseline with those essential documents has proven valuable to their teachers.

