



Your School Rating: How it was Determined, What it Really Means

Mississippi's A through F school rating system, when introduced by the Legislature, was described as "more transparent" and as a way to "clarify district performance for parents." Parents and educators are finding that isn't the case.

Most of the public assumes that A schools have more high performing students than do schools with lower ratings and that teachers in an A school are doing better work than teachers in a C school. Neither of those assumptions is necessarily true.

The ratings model is complex, with many components that affect the A-F labels awarded schools and school districts, but changes in the ["growth" component may be of particular interest](#) to those whose school ratings under the new model are significantly different from past ratings. The 2016 ratings are the first since 2013 for which schools do not have a waiver.

Old Model Favored Proficiency, New Model Favors Growth

The "old" accountability model focused more strictly on proficiency, rewarding schools and districts that had many students who scored in the proficient and advanced levels on state tests. This system generally failed to acknowledge the terrific work of teachers who moved struggling students out of the lowest achievement level.

The new model seeks to address that deficiency by focusing heavily on academic growth (improvement), and it rewards schools whose students move forward in achievement, even when those students have not yet reached the "proficient" benchmark. This strong emphasis on growth means that a school can have a very low proficiency rate, with relatively few students scoring proficient or advanced, and still get an A rating.

Rewarding Growth

- Student X starts school year at proficient & remains proficient
- Student Y starts school year at minimal (lowest level) & moves up two levels to passing (still below proficient)

Old model says Student X's school did a better job than Student Y's school; current model says Student Y's school did a better job than Student X's school.

Understanding the Growth Component

In order to reward schools that do a good job of moving students academically, the current model awards extra points for moving a student up two or more achievement levels. This paints a much more accurate picture of the good work being done by teachers in schools with many students who start the year at a low achievement level and make significant gains over the course of the year.

However, this same feature disadvantages schools with large numbers of students already performing at the highest achievement level. Even when those students improve their test scores from one year to the next, there is no "next level" to obtain. While schools do get extra points for moving a student to the advanced level initially, once there, the school is not awarded extra points for keeping the student there.

If your school has consistently been rated an A in years past and received a lower rating this year, it could be that your school had a significant number of students already performing at the highest achievement level, making them ineligible for extra points and resulting in a lower overall school score.

Points to Consider: Mississippi School Accountability System

- More focus on academic growth, or the amount of learning from one year to the next for each student.
- High expectations, including a very rigorous curriculum and proficiency standards (cut scores) that are among the highest in the nation.
- Failure to award extra points to schools for keeping students at the highest achievement level (advanced), which results in lower scores for schools that had many students score "advanced" the year prior.

Components of Mississippi School Accountability System (Effective 2013-2014)

Schools (and Districts) with no 12th grade will have seven (7) components, each worth 100 points, totaling 700 possible points:

- Reading Proficiency
- Reading Growth – All Students
- Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students
- Math Proficiency
- Math Growth – All Students
- Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students
- Science Proficiency

Elementary and middle schools with no grade in which science is tested (5th or 8th) are not eligible for the 100 points possible for the science component. The total possible points for these schools is 600. For the purposes of accountability ratings, the 600-point scale is converted to a 700-point scale. This is achieved by adding the totals of the other six components and dividing the sum by 600, yielding the percent of the total possible points attained. This percent is multiplied by 700 to determine the total points awarded to that school.

Schools in which third grade is the highest grade tested (i.e., a K-3 school) have no baseline year from which to measure the academic growth component, therefore the growth of students in the next higher grade will be applied back to the students' third grade school of origin. In schools with no tested grades (i.e., K-2) the scores of students in the next higher grade in the tested subject within the same district will be applied back to the student's lower elementary school of origin.

Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, schools (and districts) with a grade 12 will have 11 components, totaling 1000 possible points:

- Reading Proficiency (100 points)
- Reading Growth – All Students (100 points)
- Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)
- Math Proficiency (100 points)
- Math Growth – All Students (100 points)
- Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)
- Science Proficiency (50 points)
- U.S. History Proficiency (50 points)
- Graduation Rate – All Students (200 points)
- *New Component:* College & Career Readiness (Percentage of Students Meeting ACT National Benchmark Scores – Math 50% and English/Reading 50%) (50 points) (Note: The CCR component is contingent upon legislative funding.)
- *New Component:* Acceleration (Participation – Percentage of Students Participating in Advanced or Dual Credit Courses and Performance – Percentage of Students Meeting Performance Targets in Advanced or Dual Credit Courses) on the following sliding scale:
 - a. Year 1 (2015-2016): Participation - 70%/Performance - 30% (50 points)
 - b. Year 2 (2016-2017): Participation - 60%/Performance - 40% (50 points)
 - c. Year 3 (2017-2018) and beyond: Participation - 50%/Performance - 50% (50 points)