

MISSISSIPPI
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

COVID-19 & Education Impact Report



Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the participation of community members and parents who graciously and generously offered their time to engage in focus group conversations around the challenges of the pandemic for their families and in their communities.

Special thanks to:

- Max Altman, Director of Research & Policy, *Southern Education Foundation* for report development
- Samira Abunemeh, Research Analyst, *Mississippi Center for Justice* for research and data extraction



From the President & CEO

Educational disparity across racial lines in Mississippi is nothing new. Since the days of segregation, the ideal of educational equity in Mississippi has found little support from our state government. That lack of support is mirrored in a lack of funding for schools in low-income, rural, and predominantly Black districts.

In 2022, the Mississippi Center for Justice launched a report to examine inequities in education that were magnified by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report looks at data from school districts in North and Central Mississippi and in the Mississippi Delta. These are school districts where 35-45% of the residents did not and still do not have access to broadband internet. Where 100% of students are on the free or reduced lunch program. Where all but one school district was graded as “failing.”

That was the situation *before* Covid.

The pandemic significantly impacted the educational infrastructure of children and families in under-resourced and under-estimated communities and school districts.

Using MCJ’s proven community engagement model, our focus was on amplifying the voices of the families on the frontlines of the education divide. This “bottom-up” analysis is complemented by a “top-down” analysis of agency and school district spending and academic achievement to identify the degree to which majority Black school districts in rural communities already facing inequities were further harmed by the pandemic. We know that this kind of information and narrative can have a significant impact on the outcomes of policy work, and we are committed to identifying and making efforts to lessen the gaps that persist.

We cannot afford to underestimate the long-term effects of school closures, poor internet access, and a dearth in wrap-around support services and resources, and we cannot afford to ignore the grave consequences of inequitable education for children across Mississippi.

For most of us, the Covid-19 pandemic is over. We’ve gone back to our normal routines. But for children and families in these underfunded Mississippi school districts, going back to a “normal” that was never equitable in the first place is not a solution.

Regards,



President and CEO
Mississippi Center for Justice



Executive Summary

In March of 2020, Mississippi's Governor issued the executive order to close schools across the state in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many schools across the nation, those in Mississippi shuttered classes and transitioned to virtual learning. Initially, what seemed like a temporary pause in classroom learning turned into a year-long student furlough in an education system already rife with inequalities and learning disparities.

This report examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education in high-need school districts. Historically, these districts often face numerous inequities that significantly hinder student achievement, from insufficient state funding to inadequate resources and staffing. For these reasons, the pandemic's impact on education in these districts has been devastating. Examining the experiences of students and parents in these districts magnifies the need for increased education funding and resources to address the pandemic effect as well as long-standing inequities that continue to plague too many districts in Mississippi.

THE REPORT FOCUSES ON FOUR KEY AREAS:



Broadband Access

With classrooms shut down during the pandemic, education shifted to full-time virtual learning. Virtual learning requires adequate internet access for online instruction. Most rural school districts are located in areas of the state in which internet access is limited to non-existent. For students in these districts, inadequate internet access created a significant barrier to online learning, despite efforts to address the issue. Digital inequity is pervasive in rural districts, an issue that will take significant investment to bridge the digital divide.



COVID Relief Funding

State and federal Covid relief funding was provided to support school districts across the state. Funding efforts helped to lessen the strain of the pandemic on district resources. However, districts faced challenges expending the allocated funds due to the expansive needs within districts, supply chain issues, and lack of availability for staffing and resources. Inequitable school funding prior to the pandemic made it challenging for districts to prioritize Covid relief funding, as funding needs were expansive and critical in nearly every aspect of education, from infrastructure to teacher shortages.



Learning Loss

Inadequate internet access and inequitable resources directly impacted the ability for students in rural districts to learn remotely. Efforts to address this issue were helpful, but insufficient. Even with devices provided, students and parents who lacked internet access struggled to maintain academic engagement. Students with disabilities were especially impacted, as most districts provided little to no virtual alternatives and reduced or eliminated various support services. These factors directly impacted student achievement and resulted in learning loss. Exactly how much learning loss is evident in statewide and national assessments.



Social-Emotional Impact

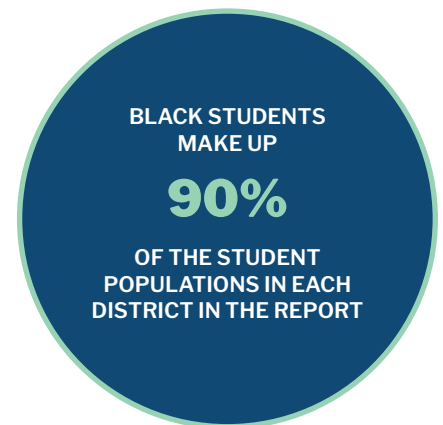
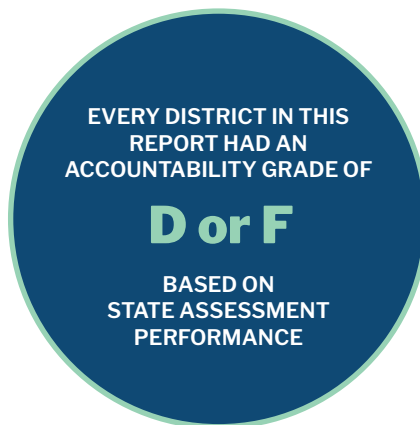
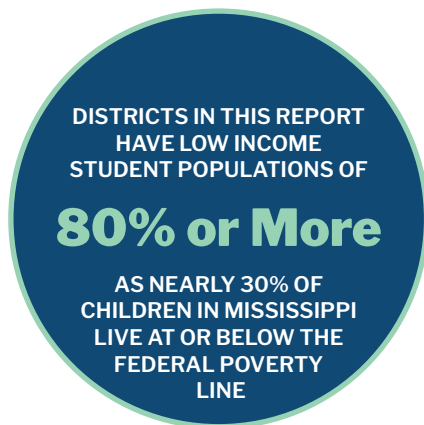
For students and parents, alike, no one was truly prepared for Covid-19's impact on education and the transition to full-time virtual learning. The stress and challenges of the Covid-19 virus coupled with this new learning experience created a surge of issues impacting mental health for parents and students. Inequitable funding and resources for mental health support services in rural districts created additional challenges for schools and families. Recovering from the pandemic will require both academic and mental health supports.

Introduction

Education equity in Mississippi has been an issue met with much resistance throughout its history. Ten years after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, schools in Mississippi were still segregated. It was not until the 1970 *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* ruling that schools in Mississippi were finally forced to desegregate. Remnants of this resistance to fairly educate every child in Mississippi remain evident through systemic inequities that foster a growing opportunity gap for students who are primarily Black and live in high-need communities. The result is a state education and economic system that has been stymied by its past for decades.

The Covid-19 pandemic merely exposed more deeply the wide chasm of disparities among school districts across Mississippi. This report examines how the pandemic, coupled with pre-existing disparities, impacted the lives of real families in high-need school districts, providing a snapshot of how education inequity in Mississippi remains an untenable reality.

EDUCATION LANDSCAPE: PRE-PANDEMIC



MISSISSIPPI'S OPPORTUNITY GAP IS RANKED

15th

in the Nation^[1]

THE OPPORTUNITY GAP IS HOW FACTORS BEYOND ONE'S CONTROL, SUCH AS RACE OR ECONOMIC STATUS, CONTRIBUTE TO LOWER RATES OF SUCCESS IN EDUCATION, CAREERS, ETC.

Opportunity Gap

According to the *School Finance Indicators Database (SFID)*:^[2]

- Educational opportunity in MS is HIGHLY unequal
- Spending in MS's highest-poverty districts is **55.4%** (\$13,492 Per Pupil) below the estimated adequate level, compared with **17.7%** (\$1,925 Per Pupil) below adequate in the state's wealthiest districts.
- MS's opportunity gap contributes to its student outcome gap



Report Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to examine how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted high-need school districts. Using a mixed methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data, a broader understanding of the pandemic effect on broadband access, learning loss, school funding, and social-emotional well-being is evident.

Design

Quantitative and qualitative data were used in the report for the purpose of data discovery and fact-finding. Quantitative data extraction from state and national databases illustrates historical and current trends in student achievement and broadband accessibility. Qualitative data gathered from focus groups conducted in selected school districts captures the lived experiences of participants. In-person focus groups were conducted in 7 counties, with two conducted via Zoom, and included 6 to 8 participants in each focus group. Focus group data was then transcribed and coded by focus area themes.

Participants

12 Public School Districts were examined in this report. Each school district has student populations that are predominantly Black and located in rural, high-need municipalities in Mississippi, with the exception of one urban district. Parents/guardians with one or more child or children in selected school districts participated in focus groups for the report. Additionally, parents of students with disabilities from various districts who are part of a statewide support network participated in focus groups.

REPORT SAMPLE

12

School Districts

CONCENTRATED IN THE MS DELTA AND OTHER RURAL DISTRICTS ACROSS THE STATE

- ABERDEEN
- COAHOMA
- GREENWOOD-LEFLORE
- HOLMES
- JACKSON PUBLIC
- KEMPER
- NOXUBEE
- NORTH BOLIVAR
- WEST BOLIVAR
- SOUTH DELTA
- WILKINSON
- YAZOO CITY MUNICIPAL

QUALITATIVE DATA

7

Focus Groups

CONDUCTED WITH 42 PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Data Extraction

FROM STATE AND NATIONAL DATABASES

Mississippi Response to Covid-19

At the beginning of school closings in March of 2020 many districts were not prepared for virtual learning, lacking both digital devices and broadband access. In response, the MS legislature passed two pieces of legislation:

- *The Equity in Distance Learning Act (EDLA)* allocated \$130 million to school districts based on student enrollment, with \$20 million to distribute to districts based on need.
- *The Mississippi Pandemic Response Broadband Availability Act* provided \$50 million to districts to help expand internet access to students living in underserved areas.

While state efforts were helpful, they were insufficient in adequately addressing internet accessibility. The distribution of funds by student enrollment meant larger, wealthier districts with greater broadband availability received more funding than smaller, poorer districts with less broadband availability despite funding attempts to lessen the disparity gap.

Districts primarily used these state funds to purchase much needed digital devices and tools for students. However, for students in districts in this report, having digital tools without adequate broadband access left many students still unserved or underserved. The lack of sufficient digital infrastructure in rural communities pre-pandemic lessened the intended impact of state funding support for districts and indicates the need for greater state and federal investment in rural communities.



EDLA/MS Connects District Allocation

| School District | Devices | LMS | Total Cost |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 1,175 | 0 | \$483,548.64 |
| Coahoma County SD | 1,645 | 0 | \$694,031.30 |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD* | 2,901 | 4,800 | \$1,431,245.45 |
| Holmes County CSD | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Jackson Public SD | 17,882 | 13,255 | \$7,539,843.16 |
| Kemper County SD | 850 | 0 | \$386,203.18 |
| Noxubee County SD | 1,620 | 1,425 | \$1,262,156.25 |
| North Bolivar CSD | 978 | 450 | \$403,175.10 |
| West Bolivar CSD | 1,080 | 0 | \$482,321.97 |
| South Delta SD | 837 | 0 | \$375,246.14 |
| Wilkinson County SD | 1,194 | 0 | \$527,832.69 |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 2,625 | 0 | \$1,141,754.13 |

LMS=Learning Management System

Table: K1W • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Broadband Availability Act District Allocation

| School District | Number of Households | Allocation |
|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 699 | \$139,418.89 |
| Coahoma County SD | 779 | \$145,644.08 |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 3,337 | \$444,989.37 |
| Holmes County CSD | 1,750 | \$498,236.39 |
| Jackson Public SD | 13,181 | \$1,408,028.31 |
| Kemper County SD | 578 | \$231,046.07 |
| Noxubee County SD | 1,117 | \$223,867.38 |
| North Bolivar CSD | 695 | \$140,498.51 |
| West Bolivar CSD | 806 | \$271,259.70 |
| South Delta SD | 540 | \$173,823.45 |
| Wilkinson County SD | 849 | \$163,205.13 |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 1,308 | \$148,413.23 |

Table: K1W • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Broadband Access: Common Barriers



There is no Internet connection

There is something wrong with the proxy server or the address is incorrect

Try:

- Contacting the system admin
- Checking the proxy address
- Running Network Diagnostics

For districts in this report, parents and children experienced a broad swath of issues related to broadband access, despite state and federal efforts to mitigate them. Rural areas of Mississippi typically lack sufficient infrastructure for adequate internet access. For areas where internet is available, reliability and cost factors often limit access. Parent responses reflect this reality, as many of them grappled with how to provide internet access for their children to actively engage in virtual learning.



Most parents when this first started were not prepared...they had to go and upgrade their internet services. Some couldn't afford to do those things.

I had to take mine from house to house. With my Grandma, she didn't have wifi... We had to make do. We had to upload it on the phone.

...in Cary at our church, we had to go ahead and get internet at the church so that some of the kids would be able to sign in because it's a rural area, and some of them stay so far out they can't get internet.



Affordability

- **22%** of offline Black households nationwide cited cost as a factor for not using broadband^[17]
- **44%** of households with incomes less than \$35,000 lack broadband^[11]
- In the Black rural south, **60.8%** of Black households have incomes less than \$35,000^[11]
- **38%** of Black Americans with lower-incomes who have broadband access worry about paying their bills^[11]
- Digital poverty describes incomes that put even the least expensive broadband services out of reach and is a significant factor in the lack of broadband access^[10]

Availability

- ISPs are less likely to build digital infrastructure/deploy broadband in sparsely populated areas
- Low income rural areas experience digital redlining
- Competition between ISPs offering broadband services is less likely in low-income areas and those with a large share of Black residents
- **25.8%** of those in the Black Rural South are unable to subscribe to high-speed broadband
- **76.2%** of Black Rural South households do not use broadband of at least 25 Mbps^[10]

MISSISSIPPI IS ONE OF 10 STATES WITH THE LARGEST POPULATION OF K-12 STUDENTS AFFECTED BY LACK OF BROADBAND AVAILABILITY^[23]

STATE & FEDERAL BROADBAND ASSISTANCE EFFORTS: (EDLA; BROADBAND AVAILABILITY ACT; ESSER; ECF; E-RATE; ACP) – PROVIDED LIMITED AND INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN RURAL AREAS



Broadband Access: Affordability

Broadband affordability presented challenges for participants in this report. Parents expressed how even if internet access was available, costs created barriers for them and their students. There are a number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) available in most school district areas. However, *The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Indicators of Need* data^[17] reveal that while broadband is available in all of these district counties, affordability contributes to the lack of access based on district/county median family incomes and the likelihood that some ISPs may not offer lost cost plan options.

Number of County ISPs 2021

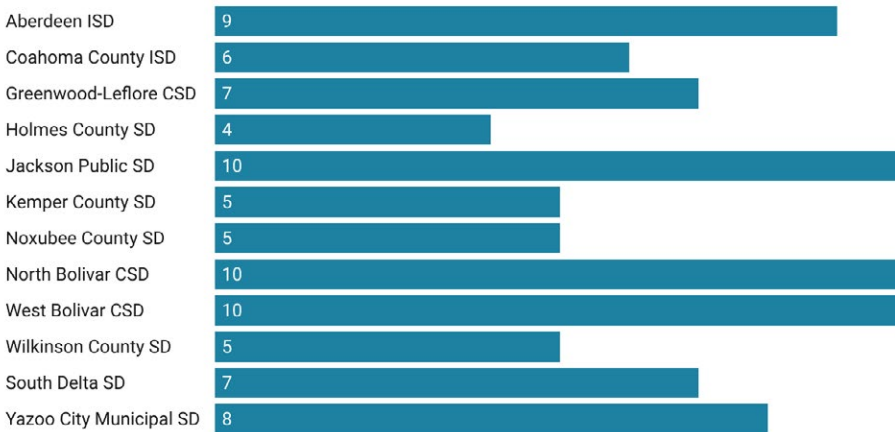


Chart: K LW • Source: NTIA • Created with Datawrapper

NTIA Indicators of Need - No Internet 2021

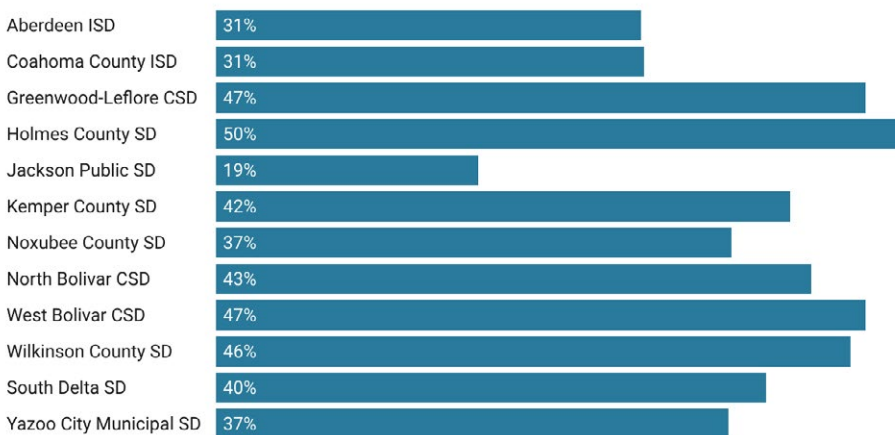


Chart: K LW • Source: NTIA • Created with Datawrapper



...when Covid happened, they were saying parents had to have adequate internet... having adequate internet is one thing, but they weren't paying for it...a lot of parents didn't have the money for internet. Some people's kids had to sit outside hotel parking lots just to get the internet...just to do their work.



BOLIVAR COUNTY HAS 10 ISPS, YET NEARLY 50% OF RESIDENTS LACK INTERNET ACCESS - ITS MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME IS

\$29,854

ONLY ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THIS REPORT HAS A MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME ABOVE \$30,000^[4]

ACCORDING TO THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER^[11]

34%

OF HOUSEHOLD INCOMES OF LESS THAN \$30,000 HAD TROUBLE PAYING FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET SERVICE DURING COVID-19



We have a provider in Alligator...with a \$200 installation fee, and then \$65 a month after that...so people tend to go with Hughes Net...but over time Hughes Net goes up and up and up ...I had to end up increasing my data plan, and I was paying close to \$200 in order to have enough data to last the whole day.





Broadband Access: Availability

In examining broadband availability in Mississippi, data discrepancies exist that can be misleading. While internet access may be available in certain areas according to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data,^[6,7] it does not necessarily mean that everyone in that area has broadband. This discrepancy lies in how the FCC collects data about broadband access in states. It's estimates rely upon self-reporting by Internet Service Providers (ISPs). For participants in this report, broadband availability improved in 2021 based on FCC data. However, availability and reliability were often unbalanced. Many parents and students dealt with slow internet speeds and download capabilities or endured spotty coverage that was unreliable due to weather related issues.

Total County Population Without Broadband FCC 2020

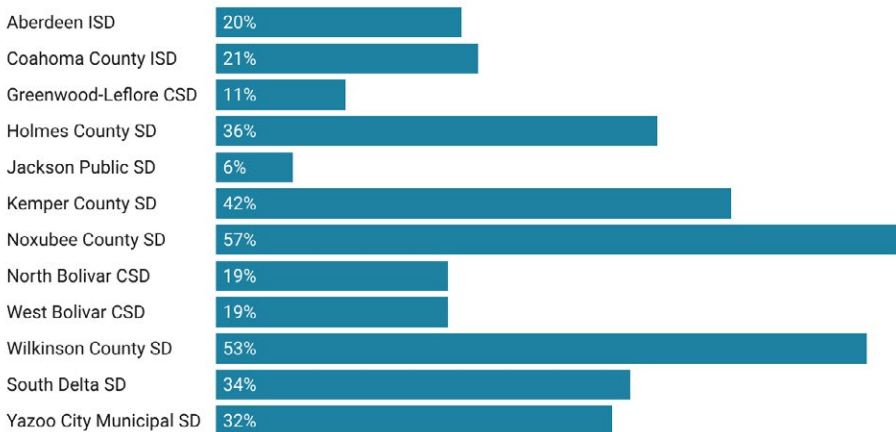


Chart: K LW • Source: Federal Communications Commission • Created with Datawrapper



It was stressful...I'm a retired educator myself...and having four grandchildren at home...the internet ...at 12:00 everyday it would go out...so they couldn't get back online until the next day.

I had internet. But the internet, it's not super fast speed, especially with three people being on it at the same time... it was in and out sometimes. Even the school's internet dropped...The school's internet dropped probably more than the students' did.

Total County Population Without Broadband FCC 2021

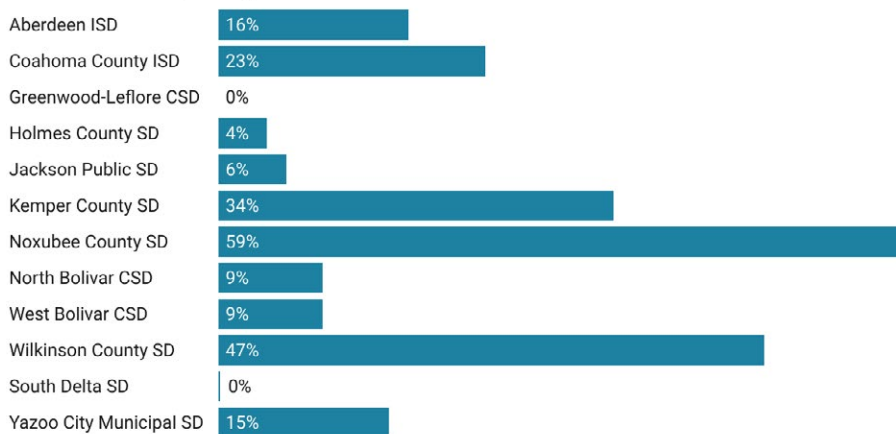


Chart: K LW • Source: Federal Communications Commission • Created with Datawrapper

Some of the wifi is really, really slow...a good rain storm comes along, it won't work...The ones that lived in the more rural areas, they were always complaining that their internet wasn't working, especially on rainy days.

The internet service was breaking up so bad – at first I had to telework, and I couldn't telework because everybody was streaming, so my internet wasn't working, and I pretty much got really behind on my work trying to make sure they were doing their work.



BROADBAND IN MISSISSIPPI: FAST FACTS ACCORDING TO BROADBAND NOW^[3]

80% of residents have access to wired or fixed wireless broadband = **2 in 10** residents are not able to purchase an internet plan of at least 25 Mbps download/ 3 Mbps upload

33.3% of residents have access to low-priced broadband plans = **7 in 10** residents are not able to purchase broadband at a price of \$60 or less

There are **136** Internet Service Providers in Mississippi. Mississippi ranks **48th** in internet coverage, speed, and availability & **50th** for the number of residents (**77%**) who have access to 100 Mbps broadband

77% have access to broadband of any type
24% have no internet access
16% have no computer, tablet, or smartphone



Broadband Access: Digital Equity

Each of the school districts in the report utilized virtual learning for some or all of instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. For districts that were virtual for the entire school year, this posed significant challenges and consequences for students and families due to the digital inequities that exist. These challenges magnify the digital divide for students in rural school districts and broadens the opportunity gap that already exists.

- Students with no internet/cell phone only access have a digital gap equivalent to that between 8th and 11th grade students.
- 47% of students with no internet/cell phone only access plan to complete a post-secondary program compared to 60% of those with access and 65% of those with high-speed access.
- Digital skills are correlated to better scores on standardized tests.
- Lower grades and weaker standardized test scores associated with poor internet access reduce the chances of students to qualify for scholarships.

- Broadband Gap Quello Report^[9]

ON AVERAGE, STUDENTS WITH FAST HOME INTERNET ACCESS REPORT AN OVERALL GRADE POINT AVERAGE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN STUDENTS WITH NO ACCESS OR THOSE WHO HAVE ONLY CELL PHONE INTERNET ACCESS

3.18 GPA - Internet
2.81 GPA - No Internet
2.75 GPA - Cell Phone Only

- Broadband Gap Quello Report^[9]

The lack of broadband equity in Mississippi may have long lasting implications for students in the districts in this report and beyond. Research indicates there is a correlation between internet access and academic achievement and standardized test scores. With the average ACT scores for districts in the report below the state minimum, inadequate internet access can have a significant impact on student achievement. Aside from the academic impact, the ability to be prepared for the workforce with necessary digital skills can create additional barriers for students who lack broadband access beyond post-secondary education.

School District ACT Scores

| School District | 2022 Average Score | 2021 Average Score | 2019 Average Score |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Aberdeen School SD | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| Coahoma County SD | 14 | 14 | 15 |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Holmes County CSD | 14 | 14 | 15 |
| Jackson Public SD | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Kemper County SD | 15 | 14 | 15 |
| North Bolivar CSD | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Noxubee County SD | 15 | 14 | 15 |
| South Delta SD | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| West Bolivar CSD | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Wilkinson County SD | 14 | 15 | 14 |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 13 | 13 | 14 |

Table: K LW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

“ My daughter is about to go to college...she had to do geometry online... and Algebra II virtually, so she really didn't have any math, after Algebra that was it. And it showed on her ACT score.

My kid? When he gets to college next year, I already told him, 'you're going to have a problem with your English classes, and it's going to be okay.' I'm just trying to prepare him because it's one thing when you're failing because you're not trying to do it, but it's a whole different thing when you're trying your best and you just don't know because it wasn't taught to you.

”

Learning Loss: Academic Achievement



For participants in this report, the impact of Covid-19 on learning loss was significant. Virtual learning, along with existing digital inequities directly impacted student achievement. Parent responses indicate student learning loss and declines in academic grades across districts. Likewise, despite state and district growth gains on state tests in 2022, proficiency performance for districts in this report are far below the state average, with an increase in students scoring at the two lowest performance levels, Minimal and Basic in math and/or English Language Arts (ELA).^[16]



A lot of education was lost during that time. Instruction was just lost, which made it rough when you had 10th graders when Covid hit, now they're seniors. So, you're having to try to go back and pull some of those skills that they should have gotten in the 10th and 11th grade now that they're seniors getting ready to graduate.

...a lot of our kids ended up dropping out, working instead of going to class.

My son had quite a few classes online using Great Results his senior year. I remember at one point, he was taking a class...And the teacher wasn't even communicating for a whole month. So, they just had the assignments on the platform that they had to go in to do, and there was no guidance.



Statewide Accountability MAAP Data

After seeing large drops in statewide accountability performance in 2021 on the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP), growth performance increased at the state and district levels in 2022. As a result, many school districts in this report saw their state accountability grades improve. However, statewide proficiency results differ widely from that of school districts in this report, as every district in this report has proficiency levels far below the state average in math and ELA. A preliminary review of recently released state test scores for the 2022 -2023 SY reveal that statewide, overall achievement improved, returning to or exceeding pre-pandemic levels. For districts in this study, although proficiency improved across districts, most remain below the state average in math and ELA.

| STATEWIDE PROFICIENCY (% PROFICIENT & ADVANCED) | | | |
|--|--------|------|--------|
| SUBJECT | 2019 | 2021 | 2022 |
| MATH | 47% | 36% | 46.80% |
| ELA | 41.80% | 35% | 41.90% |

District ELA Proficiency

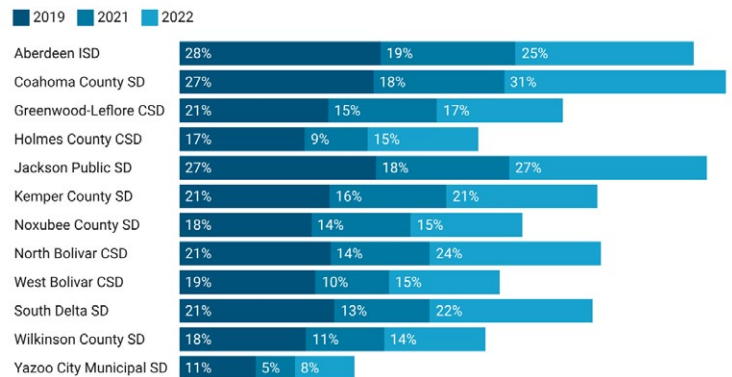
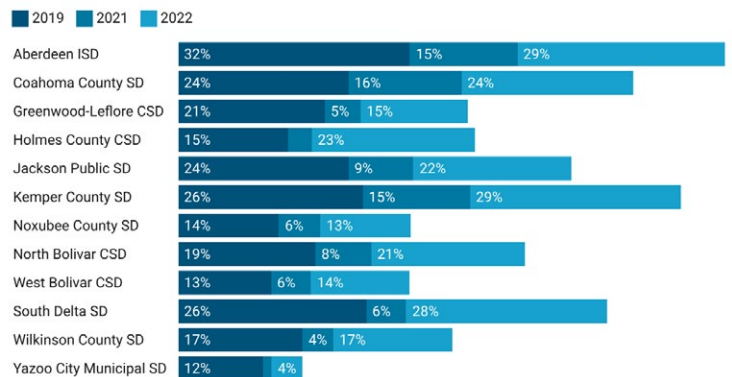


Chart: KLV • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

District Math Proficiency



2021 Holmes County = 3% & Yazoo City = 1%

Chart: KLV • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Learning Loss: Academic Achievement



Pre-pandemic and post-pandemic MAAP performance data indicates that school districts in this report saw a significant increase in the percentage of students scoring at the two lowest performance levels, **Minimal** and **Basic**, in ELA and/or math. This could indicate that students scoring below proficient prior to the pandemic performed worse than their pre-pandemic levels.

Grade Level Math Performance

There are significant increases in Minimal and/or Basic scores in Grades 3-8 across nearly every district in math. This may indicate that students who scored Passing, Minimal, or Basic before the pandemic are now faring worse and are further behind academically. While each grade level saw increases in the lowest scoring levels, grades 4, 5 & 7 had the most significant increases in Minimal and/or Basic Scores.

Note: 2022-2023 math MAAP data for grades 4,5, & 7 indicates a decrease in minimal and basic scores across districts, although several have scores that, while improved remain above pre-pandemic levels.



My son was in 3rd grade then when it shut down. So...he took his 3rd grade brain to 5th grade. So, the 3rd grader is trying to do 5th grade work...he was already a struggling math student at that time.

Their grades were failing. I'm talking about children who were making good grades every term. They had Fs...One child had to go to summer school, and she had never had to go to summer school before...that was very, very overwhelming.

I was in tenth grade when Covid first started, and I lost a year in high school. One of my classes in 11th grade, I had to take English online with no teacher...we didn't have a teacher to tell us, you do this or you do that...I had an 80, and I had a 75...and I was really upset because I'm a straight A student.

... it was scary as far as my youngest especially...because he has an attention disorder...that was really, really rough. His grades suffered because of it...he was able to pass. A couple of classes, especially math, it was the skin of his teeth, but he made it.

My son was in the gifted class, and he had to take intermediate classes -that's how bad his grades dropped when he was online.



% Minimal & Basic 4th Grade Math Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 0% | 18% | 32% | 41% |
| Coahoma County SD | 9% | 9% | 29% | 31% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 13% | 32% | 28% | 36% |
| Holmes County CSD | 14% | 36% | 33% | 41% |
| Jackson Public SD | 11% | 21% | 32% | 36% |
| Kemper County SD | 13% | 18% | 34% | 40% |
| Noxubee County SD | 12% | 42% | 39% | 34% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 4% | 17% | 29% | 33% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 22% | 60% | 26% | 25% |
| South Delta SD | 14% | 23% | 35% | 42% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 19% | 52% | 37% | 30% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 20% | 49% | 54% | 38% |

Table: KJW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

% Minimal & Basic 5th Grade Math Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 6% | 11% | 16% | 41% |
| Coahoma County SD | 7% | 11% | 27% | 26% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 13% | 20% | 25% | 50% |
| Holmes County CSD | 16% | 27% | 33% | 37% |
| Jackson Public SD | 10% | 16% | 20% | 38% |
| Kemper County SD | 13% | 16% | 24% | 59% |
| Noxubee County SD | 11% | 24% | 32% | 56% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 6% | 25% | 32% | 43% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 24% | 15% | 45% | 54% |
| South Delta SD | 2% | 6% | 16% | 46% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 17% | 30% | 28% | 42% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 17% | 37% | 31% | 51% |

Table: KJW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

% Minimal & Basic 7th Grade Math Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 2% | 5% | 19% | 26% |
| Coahoma County SD | 6% | 14% | 30% | 38% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 1% | 15% | 14% | 38% |
| Holmes County CSD | 4% | 7% | 32% | 39% |
| Jackson Public SD | 4% | 14% | 30% | 41% |
| Kemper County SD | 1% | 8% | 31% | 22% |
| Noxubee County SD | 8% | 25% | 36% | 38% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 4% | 21% | 61% | 27% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 16% | 18% | 38% | 40% |
| South Delta SD | 3% | 11% | 22% | 39% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 7% | 19% | 25% | 43% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 8% | 25% | 42% | 53% |

Table: KJW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper



Grade Level ELA Performance

As with Math, there were significant increases in Minimal and/or Basic scores in Grades 3-8 across districts in ELA. This may indicate that students who scored Passing, Minimal, or Basic before the pandemic are likely faring worse in this subject area and are further behind academically. Although there were increases in scores at the lowest levels across all grade levels, grades 3, 5, & 8 saw some of the largest increases in Minimal and/or Basic scores.

2022-2023 ELA MAAP data for grades 3, 5, & 8 indicates mixed results for minimal and basic scores: with a decrease in scores for most districts, several with scores that remain above pre-pandemic levels, and some with scores that have increased.

% Minimal & Basic 3rd Grade ELA Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 3% | 17% | 18% | 25% |
| Coahoma County SD | 14% | 23% | 25% | 27% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 19% | 34% | 33% | 28% |
| Holmes County CSD | 15% | 36% | 32% | 28% |
| Jackson Public SD | 10% | 20% | 24% | 20% |
| Kemper County SD | 9% | 25% | 22% | 20% |
| Noxubee County SD | 21% | 38% | 31% | 27% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 17% | 22% | 33% | 32% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 13% | 34% | 27% | 21% |
| South Delta SD | 22% | 14% | 30% | 26% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 9% | 31% | 22% | 21% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 22% | 39% | 42% | 30% |

Table: KIW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

% Minimal & Basic 5th Grade ELA Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 7% | 13% | 18% | 25% |
| Coahoma County SD | 12% | 16% | 20% | 22% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 14% | 29% | 32% | 29% |
| Holmes County CSD | 13% | 28% | 34% | 25% |
| Jackson Public SD | 11% | 13% | 20% | 17% |
| Kemper County SD | 8% | 25% | 29% | 28% |
| Noxubee County SD | 13% | 19% | 30% | 31% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 11% | 25% | 26% | 30% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 33% | 23% | 27% | 29% |
| South Delta SD | 11% | 21% | 16% | 24% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 14% | 29% | 34% | 22% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 34% | 33% | 31% | 38% |

Table: KIW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

% Minimal & Basic 8th Grade ELA Scores

| School District | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 18% | 16% | 18% | 19% |
| Coahoma County SD | 6% | 14% | 27% | 17% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 6% | 30% | 14% | 18% |
| Holmes County CSD | 18% | 28% | 23% | 23% |
| Jackson Public SD | 18% | 27% | 20% | 17% |
| Kemper County SD | 21% | 17% | 27% | 25% |
| Noxubee County SD | 18% | 24% | 17% | 23% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 19% | 28% | 18% | 25% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 21% | 42% | 24% | 21% |
| South Delta SD | 9% | 14% | 30% | 19% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 24% | 40% | 36% | 26% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 13% | 38% | 29% | 25% |

Table: KIW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

3rd Grade Reading Assessment - % Passed

| School District | 2018-2019 SY | 2021-2022 SY |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 81% | 60% |
| Coahoma County SD | 63% | 52% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 44% | 40% |
| Holmes County CSD | 51% | 35% |
| Jackson Public SD | 64% | 61% |
| Kemper County SD | 66% | 64% |
| Noxubee County SD | 44% | 39% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 46% | 44% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 62% | 49% |
| South Delta SD | 46% | 62% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 65% | 54% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 32% | 36% |

Table: KIW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper



The increase in Minimal and Basic student performance in Grade 3 ELA appears to result in fewer students passing the required 3rd grade reading assessment, which means there is an increase in the number of students retained in the 3rd grade for the 2022-2023 SY. Results for the 2022-2023 SY show improved scores and passage rates, which may or may not share some correlation to the retention rate. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) requires all 3rd graders to pass the reading portion of MAAP ELA in order to be promoted to 4th grade.

Learning Loss: Students with Disabilities



No other subgroup of students may have been impacted more by the pandemic than students with disabilities. With school closures, support services usually delivered in person to students with disabilities were severely limited or discontinued altogether. Despite state and federal Covid-19 guidelines to address providing services for students with disabilities that meet the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements, school districts often faced challenges meeting those requirements, leaving many students with disabilities with minimal support services or none at all.

Parents of students with disabilities in this report described the numerous challenges faced during school closures. The discontinuation of support services along with the lack of assistive technology aids to make virtual learning more accessible led to significant learning losses. In an attempt to make up for these deficiencies, some parents had to take on multiple roles to ensure their children received adequate instruction during school closures. The notebook image below details the day to day routine of a parent who tried to fill in the gaps for her son who struggled with adapting to virtual learning.



...they were not receiving the number of hours that gen ed students were receiving...I don't know of any that were... you didn't have enough SPED teachers to provide individualized education supports to every student with an IEP...so that was their excuse...or, we don't have providers, we don't have a ST...we don't have this... we don't have that.....most of those kids got nothing...the entire time...nothing.

...parents I work with all said...their children suffered...nothing was done...no recovery...no conversation...the parents were hurt because nobody showed they cared...nobody reached out to say 'we know this is happening'...the parents said, 'we understand, but show us that you care...just show us or attempt or try'... their kids lost a lot of education, and kids who needed hands on therapy didn't get it...

We did not have any type of supports in place. Basically what we did was Zoom maybe two times a week, something like that, for the teachers just to check on the children to make sure that they were okay. I would go by the school, and I would pick up the packets that they left outside in filing cabinets...But in terms of true service provision, we received none.

...it was really hard for my daughter because she thrived on routine, she thrived in the school setting, she thrived in that learning environment...we saw a lot of regression. She has a neurological condition, so a lot of the regression that I saw made me concerned that maybe she had a degenerative condition because she literally stopped progressing...with communication, with walking, with everything.



Learning Loss: Students with Disabilities



There were significant increases in Minimal and/or Basic scores for students with disabilities in Math and/or ELA among districts in the report, with Jackson Public School District as the exception. Parent responses indicate significant learning loss occurred as needed support services and direct instruction were difficult to obtain. (2022-2023 MAAP test data by student groups was not available at the time of this report.)

% Minimal & Basic Math Scores - Students with Disabilities

| | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 0-10% | 41-50% | 21-30% | 41-50% |
| Coahoma County SD | 21-30% | 20.4% | 31-40% | 47.6% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 21-30% | 31-40% | 31-40% | 41-50% |
| Holmes County CSD | 21-30% | 21-30% | 41-50% | 41-50% |
| Jackson Public SD | 31-40% | 31-40% | 41-50% | 41-50% |
| Kemper County SD | 31-40% | 21-30% | 41-50% | 51-60% |
| Noxubee County SD | 31-40% | 48.5% | 41-50% | 28.2% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 11-20% | 31-40% | 41-50% | 31-40% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 31-40% | 31-40% | 41-50% | 41-50% |
| South Delta SD | 11-20% | 21-30% | 51-60% | 41-50% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 21-30% | 67-70% | 41-50% | 21-30% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 41-50% | 41.1% | 41-50% | 48.7% |

Table: KLW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

% Minimal & Basic ELA Scores - Students with Disabilities

| | 2018-19 Minimal | 2021-22 Minimal | 2018-19 Basic | 2021-22 Basic |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | 0-10% | 21-30% | 41-50% | 41-50% |
| Coahoma County SD | 21-30% | 31-40% | 31-40% | 31-40% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | 21-32.6% | 41-50% | 31-40% | 31-40% |
| Holmes County CSD | 31-40% | 42.7% | 41-50% | 29.2% |
| Jackson Public SD | 31-40% | 31-40% | 31-40% | 31-40% |
| Kemper County SD | 41-50% | 44% | 41-50% | 34% |
| Noxubee County SD | 43.4% | 51-60% | 44.2% | 31-40% |
| North Bolivar CSD | 21-30% | 41-50% | 31-40% | 31-40% |
| West Bolivar CSD | 31-40% | 51-60% | 41-50% | 21-30% |
| South Delta SD | 41-50% | 21-30% | 31-40% | 41-50% |
| Wilkinson County SD | 27.7% | 61-70% | 48.9% | 21-30% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | 44.8% | 51-60% | 41.9% | 31-40% |

Table: KLW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper



My daughter could not have accessed online lessons independently because she can't read independently. So how were those children supposed to receive equitable education ...but yet, 'oh well, we gave them a tablet.' Well, big deal...they don't know how to turn it on and off or how to read what's on the screen...so what do you do?

With my daughter, I didn't have anything, any instructions, any kind of plan in place at all...with some of her school based therapists, we tried the telehealth...it just wasn't as effective as the face to face learning that she needs. So, there was a lot of areas that we were really let down, and it truly made a big impact that we're still kind of recovering from...the biggest thing for our school district is the lack of resources, the lack of staff, and the amount of need.

...the schools did not do what they needed to do...and as parents who were going through this...they should know what our children need and be able to provide those services...I'm not a teacher...I'm not a therapist...I did the best I could...it was just impossible for us to do any form of virtual...and I just pray nothing like that happens again so we don't have to be left without.



10 of the 12 districts in this report have been identified by MDE as critical teacher shortage areas for the 2022-23 SY across multiple subjects, including Special Education:

- Aberdeen SD
- Coahoma County SD
- Jackson Public SD
- Holmes County CSD
- Kemper County SD
- Greenwood-Leflore CSD
- Noxubee County SD
- South Delta SD
- Wilkinson SD
- Yazoo City Municipal SD

**PRE-PANDEMIC,
BASED ON MDE'S
2022 SPECIAL EDUCATION
PERFORMANCE DETERMINATION
REPORT, ONLY 3 DISTRICTS IN
THIS REPORT
MEETS EXPECTATIONS
FOR COMPLIANCE
AND RESULTS.**

Learning Loss: NAEP Data



Participants in this report describe a decline in test scores within their school districts, which appears to correlate with statewide national performance. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that although 4th grade reading held steady in Mississippi, there was a significant decline in 8th Grade reading, and 4th Grade & 8th Grade math, with more students scoring below NAEP basic level and fewer students scoring NAEP proficient. Likewise, results show the achievement gap between Black and White students in Mississippi continues to exist, virtually unchanged since the pandemic.

“ I was looking at the scores for the state of MS...in our rural areas, a lot of schools in rural areas only did about 50% on the first time. Whereas, on the Coast where all the funding is, they're scoring much higher 60, 70, 80% on the first time. So, our students are at a disadvantage. ”

Mississippi 4th Grade Math NAEP Achievement Level Percentages

| | 2019 | 2022 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Below NAEP Basic | 16% | 26% |
| NAEP Basic | 45% | 42% |
| NAEP Proficient | 33% | 28% |
| NAEP Advanced | 6% | 4% |

Table: KLW • Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) • Created with Datawrapper

Mississippi 8th Grade Math NAEP Achievement Level Percentages

| | 2019 | 2022 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Below NAEP Basic | 38% | 46% |
| NAEP Basic | 38% | 36% |
| NAEP Proficient | 19% | 15% |
| NAEP Advanced | 5% | 3% |

Table: KLW • Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress • Created with Datawrapper

In 2022, Black students in MS had an average score

25 points lower

than White students in 4th grade math

and

30 points lower

than White students in 8th grade math^[24]

Mississippi 4th Grade Reading NAEP Achievement Level Percentages

| | 2019 | 2022 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Below NAEP Basic | 35% | 37% |
| NAEP Basic | 34% | 33% |
| NAEP Proficient | 25% | 25% |
| NAEP Advanced | 6% | 6% |

Table: KLW • Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) • Created with Datawrapper

Mississippi 8th Grade Reading NAEP Achievement Level Percentages

| | 2019 | 2022 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Below NAEP Basic | 28% | 32% |
| NAEP Basic | 39% | 39% |
| NAEP Proficient | 29% | 26% |
| NAEP Advanced | 4% | 3% |

Table: KLW • Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) • Created with Datawrapper

In 2022, Black students in MS had an average score

25 points lower

than White students in 4th grade reading

and

27 points lower

than White students in 8th grade reading^[25]

“ ...we're doing summer school now to try to get the 3rd graders who failed to pass...This will be their 3rd time...these are the ones who failed the 2nd time, so now this is going to be the 3rd time. ”

COVID Relief Funding: State Funding Gap



Mississippi received Covid relief funding from three federal acts:

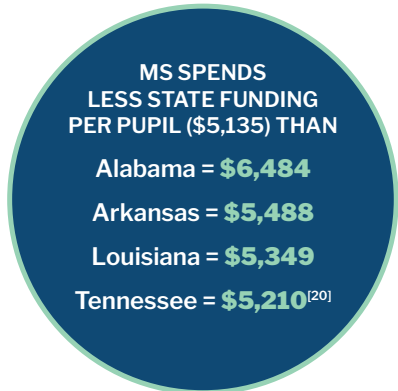
- CARES - Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act**
- CRRSA - Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act**
- ARP - American Rescue Plan Act**

These acts provided \$2.5 Billion to address Covid and its impact on education. Funds were disbursed to districts based on the federal Title I program and distributed by MDE to public school districts and independent/private schools.

Although there was an influx of Covid relief funds for education in Mississippi, chronic underfunding of education prior to the pandemic left rural, high poverty school districts statewide operating at severe deficits. Failure to invest in infrastructure and resources for decades created funding inequities that a one-time influx of funding could not eradicate.

The Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) is the state's education funding formula established in 1997. This law was designed to create equitable school funding for every student in Mississippi regardless of where a student lives.

This formula, while designed to make school funding equitable, actually falls short of doing so, as the formula does not provide additional funding for school districts with high concentrations of poverty, although an added percentage of funding is included for any student who qualifies for Free/Reduced lunch.



The MAEP Funding Formula^[19]

=

A baseline cost for students

+

District ad valorem property taxes

+

State Allocation

(% of student cost & property tax difference X district average daily attendance)

Ad valorem property taxes in rural, high poverty districts ensures that poorer districts with lower property values will receive LESS funding than wealthier school districts.

Despite the known impact of Covid-19 on education in Mississippi, MAEP was not fully funded for the 2022-2023 SY.

MAEP was last fully funded in 2008, only the second time since 1997.

DISTRICT MAEP FUNDING

| School District | FY 2023 Amount Below Full Funding | Total Loss Since 2009 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | \$640,450 | \$9,011,269 |
| Coahoma County SD | \$723,632 | \$10,344,135 |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | \$2,383,971 | \$35,508,694 |
| Holmes County CSD | \$1,587,480 | \$24,734,580 |
| Jackson Public SD | \$11,447,922 | \$179,123,240 |
| Kemper County SD | \$593,712 | \$7,777,667 |
| Noxubee County SD | \$892,575 | \$12,757,169 |
| North Bolivar CSD | \$677,548 | \$9,527,073 |
| West Bolivar CSD | \$779,683 | \$11,068,914 |
| South Delta SD | \$439,261 | \$6,121,088 |
| Wilkinson County SD | \$613,633 | \$8,897,123 |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | \$1,466,863 | \$19,005,617 |

Table: KLW · Source: Parents Campaign · Created with Datawrapper

COVID Relief Funding: District Spending



Federal Covid Relief Funding for education included three rounds of funding to assist states with addressing the impact of Covid-19 on education, known as Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER).

School districts were required to submit ESSER allocation plans to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) prior to any release of funds.^[12,13,14] With a dearth of funding challenges already an issue, districts appear to have had difficulty strategically planning for and expending funds. Underfunding prior to the pandemic, as well as the challenges of the pandemic itself likely contributed to these issues.

FY 2020 ESSER I Allocated & Expended Funds

| School District | ESSER I (Allocated) | ESSER I (Expended) | % of ESSER I Expended |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | \$514,629.00 | \$514,568.64 | 100% |
| Coahoma County ISD | \$1,155,240.00 | \$881,684.91 | 76% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | \$3,520,759.00 | \$3,343,267.53 | 95% |
| Holmes County SD | \$2,198,429.00 | \$1,056,154.46 | 48% |
| Jackson Public SD | \$12,456,522.00 | \$10,543,123.00 | 85% |
| Kemper County SD | \$590,556.00 | \$553,421.13 | 94% |
| Noxubee County SD | \$1,204,841.00 | \$1,094,793.96 | 91% |
| North Bolivar CSD | \$818,429.00 | \$671,095.39 | 82% |
| West Bolivar CSD | \$1,085,724.00 | \$1,060,737.71 | 98% |
| South Delta SD | \$649,952.00 | \$638,383.68 | 98% |
| Wilkinson County SD | \$646,009.00 | \$482,054.59 | 75% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | \$1,313,190.00 | \$1,265,719.46 | 96% |

Table: KLW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

FY 2021 ESSER II Allocated & Expended Funds

| School District | ESSER II (Allocated) | ESSER II (Expended) | % of ESSER II Expended |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | \$2,152,423.00 | \$1,168,456.73 | 54% |
| Coahoma County ISD | \$4,537,763.00 | \$1,590,565.52 | 35% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | \$16,390,365.00 | \$1,386,932.78 | 8% |
| Holmes County SD | \$8,788,598.00 | \$5,026,681.51 | 57% |
| Jackson Public SD | \$49,549,200.00 | \$12,807,650.29 | 26% |
| Kemper County SD | \$2,422,457.00 | \$1,318,363.01 | 54% |
| Noxubee County SD | \$4,387,484.00 | \$1,861,825.29 | 42% |
| North Bolivar CSD | \$3,230,382.00 | \$1,632,356.66 | 51% |
| West Bolivar CSD | \$4,299,739.00 | \$537,154.57 | 12% |
| South Delta SD | \$2,661,370.00 | \$194,032.93 | 7% |
| Wilkinson County SD | \$2,673,769.00 | \$445,056.10 | 17% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | \$5,528,970.00 | \$1,970,801.75 | 36% |

Table: KLW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

FY 2021 ESSER III Allocated & Expended Funds

| School District | ESSER III (Allocated) | ESSER III (Expended) | % of ESSER III Expended |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | \$4,733,656.00 | \$000.00 | 0% |
| Coahoma County ISD | \$9,979,549.00 | \$1,540,925.00 | 15% |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | \$36,046,052.00 | \$2,197,186.00 | 6% |
| Holmes County SD | \$19,737,942.00 | \$7,224,862.00 | 37% |
| Jackson Public SD | \$108,969,693.00 | \$5,099,521.00 | 5% |
| Kemper County SD | \$5,327,521.00 | \$178,268.00 | 3% |
| Noxubee County SD | \$10,013,795.00 | \$212,796.00 | 2% |
| North Bolivar CSD | \$6,990,722.00 | \$2,074,662.00 | 30% |
| West Bolivar CSD | \$9,456,081.00 | \$1,233,526.00 | 13% |
| South Delta SD | \$5,852,944.00 | \$218,502.00 | 4% |
| Wilkinson County SD | \$5,880,212.00 | \$428,070.00 | 7% |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | \$12,159,432.00 | \$131,996.74 | 1% |

Table: KLW - Source: Mississippi Department of Education - Created with Datawrapper

ESSER funds are temporarily available for school districts nationwide, with all funds required to be allocated by September 20, 2024 or be returned to the U.S. Department of Education. Districts are working to spend these critically needed funds before the federal deadline. Failure to expend these funds could have significant consequences for public school districts.

THE PROPOSED RAISING EXPECTATIONS WITH CHILD OPPORTUNITY VOUCHERS FOR EDUCATIONAL RECOVERY (RECOVER) ACT (S.4753)^[21], WOULD REDIRECT UNSPENT ARPA EDUCATION FUNDS TO PRIVATE SCHOLARSHIPS/VOUCHERS

COVID Relief Funding: District Spending



Participants in the report described the need for greater transparency and communication between school districts and parents in order to better utilize Covid relief funds. While most districts provided information to parents and requested parent feedback regarding district ESSER funds, parents seemed uncertain of exactly how ESSER funds were spent.



...they started to get some of that ESSER money...and they had a meeting sporadically...it was just like somebody thought, 'oh, we need parents to put a say-so on this before we can move forward.' ...It wasn't a holistic approach to getting parents' input.

...people can go to the district web site. I know there are things posted on there. It's just a lack of getting information out to the parents, and for the parents the lack of them attending meetings...that's where we face the problem.

They put out a list of stuff that they were supposed to be spending the money on...how many desks they were going to buy...masks, sanitizer...but we still had to buy everything.



District Largest Allocation of Funds for ESSER I, II & III

| School District | ESSER I | ESSER II | ESSER III |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Aberdeen ISD | Elementary Programs | Building Improvements | Elementary Programs |
| Coahoma County ISD | Education Media Services | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Greenwood-Leflore CSD | Central Support Services | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Holmes County SD | Improvement of Instruction | Other Regular Programs | Building Improvements |
| Jackson Public SD | Education Media Services | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Kemper County SD | Improvement of Instruction | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Noxubee County SD | Education Media Services | Operations & Maintenance | Building Improvements |
| North Bolivar CSD | Elementary Programs | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| West Bolivar CSD | Elementary Programs | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Wilkinson County SD | Improvement of Instruction | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| South Delta SD | Improvement of Instruction | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |
| Yazoo City Municipal SD | Education Media Services | Building Improvements | Building Improvements |

RURAL DISTRICTS SERVING HIGH POVERTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE FUNDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS AT ALMOST HALF THE LEVEL OF THE NATIONAL AVERAGE
\$2.3 MILLION ON AVERAGE PER SCHOOL COMPARED TO \$4.3 MILLION PER SCHOOL
 - 2021 State of Our Schools Report⁽⁸⁾

Table: K LW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper



CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE

For many rural, high poverty districts in this report, large portions of ESSER funds were allocated for building improvements due to decades of inadequate infrastructure investment. In December 2022, the U.S. Department of Education revised guidelines for ESSER funds for construction, limiting projects and recommending that districts not use funds for major construction purposes. For this reason, some districts had to adjust ESSER allocations and forgo building improvements.



COVID Relief Funding: District Spending



To address learning loss, districts were required to allocate a portion of ESSER funds for enrichment, remediation, and interventions. Participants in this report expressed concerns that there was not sufficient funding utilized for academic recovery.

For many districts, spending for academic recovery and for students with disabilities appears to be less than the required or needed amount. However, districts may have made adjustments to allocations as they determined the level of need. With the increase in Minimal and Basic scores in ELA and Math across districts, failure to allocate sufficient funds for academic recovery could have a significant impact on student achievement.



You see districts getting money, but...it's not making it to the classrooms where it's supposed to go. Then, here we are in the middle of the pandemic where districts are getting millions of dollars that are supposed to be put in for reinforcement and for intervention...



ESSER I, II, & III Funds Allocated for Academic Recovery

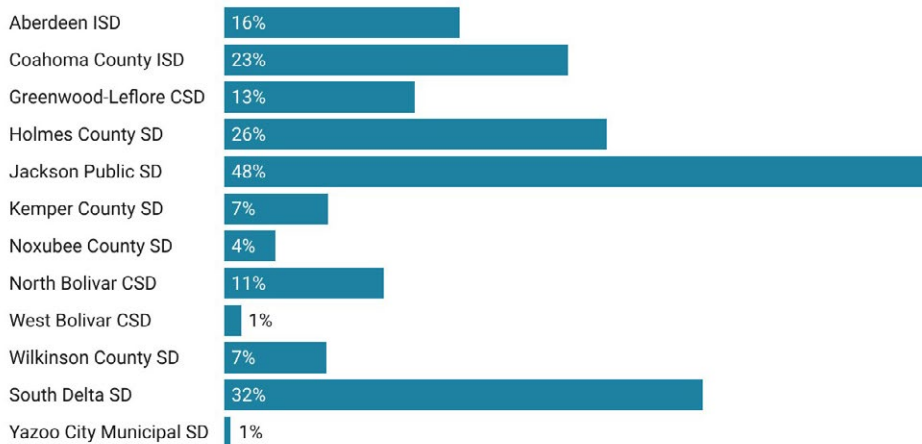


Chart: KIW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

ACADEMIC RECOVERY
 ESSER III requires school districts to obligate no less than 20% of its total allocation to address learning loss, using interventions that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and to address the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on underrepresented student subgroups, such as minority students and students with disabilities.^[18]



...There was a young lady who was a teacher who did classes out a church. She made use of the resources she had to still try to make sure kids were learning. It's infuriating to know that all this money was out here...and some parents said that even when they had the summer enrichment program, last year, it was limited up to 6th grade because they didn't have enough teachers or participants.

ESSER I, II, & III Funds Allocated for Special Education

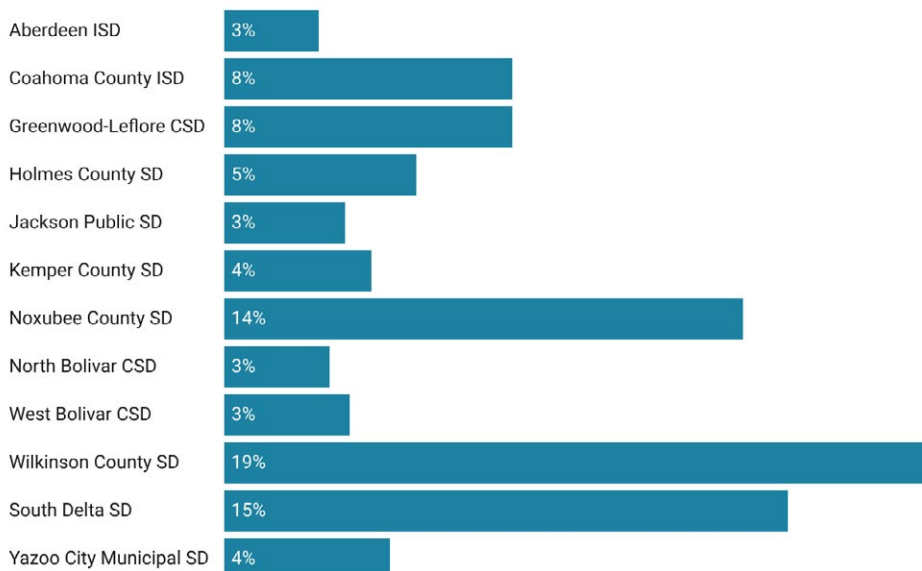


Chart: KIW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

.....my main concern was if you say that you've got this amount of money to be able to spend, then can we please hire the proper number of inclusion teachers so that our children are being properly served...when I asked where the money went, they hired an interventionist...but that doesn't help...it helps, but it doesn't necessarily help provide the services to our children in that classroom setting to give them what they need.

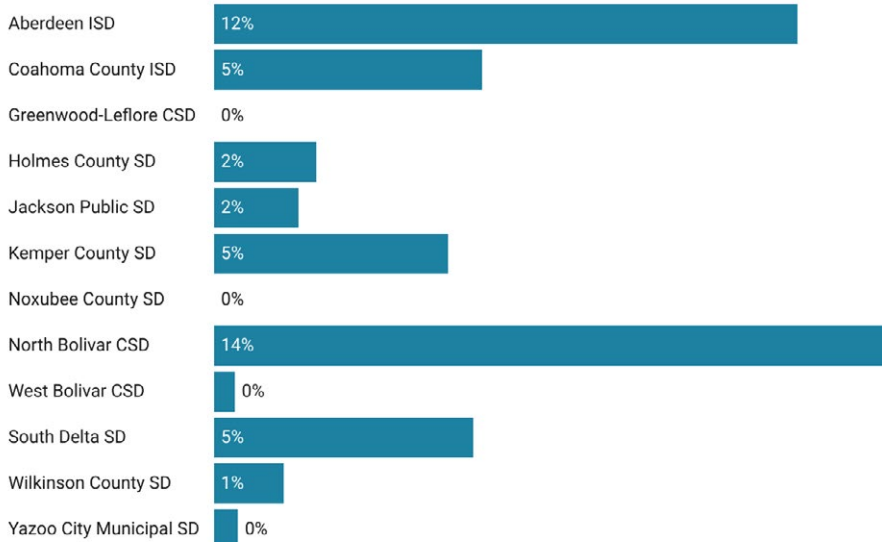


Social-Emotional Impact



The impact of Covid-19 on the social-emotional well-being of parents and students was significant, as pandemic issues beyond the classroom created additional challenges for families. Yet, only a few parents indicated they or their children sought or received help from mental health professionals. While some school districts used ESSER funds to address this issue, allocations for mental health services appear to be far less than allocations in other areas, likely impacting access to mental health services. Districts may have made adjustments to these allocations to better address this issue. However, given the access to healthcare challenges in Mississippi, the social-emotional impact of Covid-19 will likely require more sustainable funding across districts moving forward.

ESSER I, II, & III Funds Allocated for Mental Health Services



0% = Less than 1% OR No mental health categories in budget summary, but may fall under other areas
Chart: K/LW • Source: Mississippi Department of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Mississippi Ranks:

- **25th** for students identified^[5] with an emotional disturbance who have an IEP
- **34th** for children with private insurance that does not cover mental/emotional problems
- **47th** for access to care
- **48th** for youth with severe major depressive episode (MDE) who received some consistent treatment
- **50th** for youth with MDE who did not receive mental health services treatment



Those first few months...anxiety and depression set in, and emotionally...I knew I had the kid that was high risk. I knew I had the kid that had had two heart surgeries that had been hospitalized from just the common cold...for prob 8 weeks I cried myself to sleep every night just praying that he didn't get it and die...that was my fear — that my baby was going to die...

...I was having anxiety. I had to go get help. I had to go see somebody...My 17 year old, his grades started going down. He just got to a point where he didn't care...he lost three relatives during that time...He lost his grandmother, his great-grandmother, and his uncle...the same day pretty much...hours apart. So, he needed to see somebody...we all needed to see somebody.

My children, they went from being social at school to at home, no friends...that was mentally challenging, especially for my daughter because she's a people person... Then, during Covid, I lost my job. My husband lost his job. So, that was financially challenging...my husband had just recently the year before had a heart attack, so that impacted his underlying condition...it was just horrible for our family.

I got four kids...you go from your kids being at school, so you know how to manage your money and everything...to buy food accordingly. And then when they're forced to all of a sudden be at home, then you're like, 'oh, man,' things start running short...there were several days when this first started that me and my husband would not eat because our kids had to eat...There were many days that I'd sit up and cry...I tell ya'll. It was hard.



Social-Emotional Impact



The impact of school closures on social-emotional well-being was significant, as students found themselves isolated from their peers and their school settings. The long-term effects on the social-emotional development of students is an ongoing issue, and the increased need for mental health professionals in the school setting in rural school districts remains steadfast, as staffing and resources in these districts are often more challenging.



...there were two young men in Alligator who were probably seniors that year... and they didn't make it...they were probably struggling prior to Covid...

My oldest hardly ever asks to go anywhere. He was the one that was always, 'Momma can I go over here? Can I go over there?' Now?... he no longer craves that face-to-face...or wants to be in somebody's company and talk to them... there are even days now that he'll wake up and say, 'Momma, I don't want to go.'

...Being in the mental health field, I dealt with a lot of children in the school system who were not doing well at all...Really struggling. Some hit a state of depression because they were isolated, and they'd never been that way before, and it was really tough on them, which led to them not focusing in class...



OVER
70% OF CHILDREN IN
MISSISSIPPI WITH MAJOR
DEPRESSION DID NOT RECEIVE
TREATMENT, MORE THAN
THE NATIONAL PERCENTAGE
OF **60%**^[5]

PRE-PANDEMIC,
TEEN SUICIDE IN MISSISSIPPI
INCREASED BY 96%
FROM 2012 - 2019

SINCE 2019,
EMERGENCY VISITS BY
MINORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH
CRISES HAS
**INCREASED BY
NEARLY 40%**^[22]

THE STUDENT TO
COUNSELOR RATIO IN
MISSISSIPPI IS
398 TO 1, MORE
THAN THE AMERICAN SCHOOL
COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION
RECOMMENDED
250 - 1^[1]



This town really cares about education...we care a lot about football (laughs)...but we care a lot about education here...everybody in this room cares a lot about their kids getting educated. I think we did pretty well during Covid for making sure our kids got what they needed when Covid was going on.

We had parent groups, PTA, Facebook. Some parents were offering their houses as learning pods for other parents who had to work and couldn't be off and home with their children... There is still a village...people were helping because everybody was in this, and it was brand new for everybody.



Despite the enormous challenges families faced during the pandemic, parents expressed how they worked together to support each other. There was a collective effort in many districts by parents to use the limited resources in their communities to support their children. Families in these communities and school districts expressed their commitment and dedication to their children and to helping them attain the best education possible.



Conclusion

The long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Mississippi remains to be seen. What we know now, is that for students in rural, high-need districts in this report, pre-existing inequities combined with the enormous challenges of the pandemic worsened education outcomes for students. Without long term, targeted planning and financial investment to address broadband access, learning loss, school funding, and social-emotional factors, the opportunity gap for students in these communities will widen, impacting their ability to achieve in the classroom, in post-secondary education, and in the workforce.

These issues do not just impact students and parents in these school districts. They impact Mississippi as a whole and its ability to be competitive nationally and globally. It will take a joint effort among educators, lawmakers, parents, and communities to ensure that the students most impacted by the pandemic receive the additional educational support and resources they need to move forward and to use the lessons learned from the pandemic to shift the narrative and reform the barriers in education in Mississippi.

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