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AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS: A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF THE
CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE 2016 MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE ACCOUNTABILITY
SYSTEM

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Mississippi

Justin A. Geurin

August 2017

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to conduct an exploratory analysis of the 2016 Mississippi Statewide Accountability System (MSAS), which is the model by which all public school in Mississippi are assessed, rated, and ranked, in an attempt to assess whether or not the system is an effective policy tool, especially in relation to the goals associated with its development and implementation. The study was conducted in three distinct sections: Phase One analyzed the model itself and all associated documents, while the researcher also conducted interviews with several individuals with knowledge of the development of the system to establish the goals for implementation. Phase Two was a quantitative analysis of the 2015-2016 MSAS to identify if there were any issues of construct validity revealed in the results, primarily looking at the Top-15 and Bottom-15 districts in the state. Phase Three consisted of one-on-one interviews with community members in six school districts across Mississippi, three from the Top-15 group and three from the Bottom-15 group, in hopes of identifying the perception surrounding the accountability model and whether or not it had any impact on the local communities being served. While Phase One revealed implementation goals centered on themes of *simplification* and *improvement*, Phase Two highlighted several issues of construct validity across the various components being measured, and Phase Three revealed stakeholder perceptions centered on themes of *knowledge of the accountability system*, which was extremely limited, and *impact of the accountability grades on the local community*, which was unanimously perceived to be a direct link. Overall, as the MSAS was developed to provide parents and community members

with reliable information about the performance of their local schools and guide improvement, the results of this study appear to prove the model is an ineffective policy tool, as a lack of knowledge of the system and its intricacies is widespread and the components being measured raise several validity issues, which leave room for potential inequities in the education system, especially for areas stricken by widespread poverty. In spite of these issues with the model, community members across the state see the potential impact a school or district's accountability grade has on the local community and it is therefore necessary for the Mississippi Legislature, the Mississippi Department of Education, educators, and community stakeholders to re-convene and further discuss the issue of accountability and how best to move the state's public education system forward to promote student achievement and community development.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, who is the most beautiful, understanding, and patient person I have ever known, and without her unwavering support and encouragement, I would never have been able to accomplish this feat. It is also dedicated to my daughters, Elizabeth and Lillian, who inspire me every day to do my part to ensure they have every opportunity for a quality and equitable education system to unlock their potential for learning and growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation and completing this doctorate is the most difficult task I have ever undertaken; yet, throughout this journey I have learned it is a process that is by no means an individual endeavor. To that end, I first acknowledge my wife, Robin, for her love, support, and commitment throughout. She is without a doubt the person who has suffered most for this quest, by enduring many days without a helper, nights without a companion, and all of the emotions and breakdowns, both mental and physical, along the way. Without her by my side, I would have given up long ago, and for that I am ever in her debt.

I would also be remiss to overlook the impact of the support of my loving family, beginning with my mother and father, who have always supported and encouraged me, while teaching me the value of hard work and dedication. I must also thank my brother, who was always available to listen to me rant about the state of public education, or the progress (or sometimes lack thereof) on my dissertation. To Mom, Dad, and Zac, thank you.

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and helping to guide me through the world of K-12 administration and the Ph.D. process. You are the dearest of friends and one of the best people I have ever encountered. Thank you for everything!

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Finally, to my colleagues in the EDLD program: you have all been a great inspiration to me throughout our time at Ole Miss and I have no doubt each of you will continue on to great success throughout the remainder of your careers. Each of you have a passion for education that is uplifting, and I know you will each do your part to support the students, educators, and families you serve moving forward. Congratulations everybody, we did it!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When the 2015-2016 Mississippi Statewide Accountability System (MSAS) results were released in the fall of 2016, the Greeneville Public School District, located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta region, posted the eleventh best growth rate in the state in mathematics for the bottom 25% of their students. This is a remarkable accomplishment to be celebrated for a high-poverty, traditionally underperforming school. Yet, in terms of the overall rating, Greeneville Public Schools was ranked as the 11th worst district in the state and received an overall grade of “F.” On the other hand, using the same indicator (mathematics growth for the bottom 25% of students), some of the highest rated districts in the state ranked quite poorly. For instance, Petal School District (sixth best overall in the state), Pass Christian School District (10th), Madison County School District (11th), and Enterprise School District (13th) had growth rates in mathematics for the bottom 25% of students ranked 100th, 117th, 110th, and 119th, respectively (MDE 2016 Accountability Report, 2016). These schools all received an “A” rating according to MSAS and were celebrated as some of the best public school districts statewide. So, what is the real story? Greeneville Public Schools clearly has at minimum some teachers and administrators doing exemplary work in certain areas, yet any celebration of the math growth for the bottom 25% of the students is overwhelmed by the “F” rating and many of those same educators may be at risk of losing their jobs as a result. People in the local community are no doubt disheartened by the “F” rating and may have a negative perception of their schools and district, while the

children of the district, whose very education and future are at stake, are being tossed about in the tumult resulting from these accountability results. Additionally, consistently low-performing school districts, specifically those in high-poverty areas, often experience difficulty hiring and retaining quality teachers and administrators (Hargreaves, Parsley, & Cox, 2015). Given the potential impact on students, educators, and community members, it is worth considering if these consequences are consistent with the goals of the accountability system.

Every year Mississippi administrators, teachers, students, schools, and districts are evaluated, rated, and ranked using the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System designed by the Mississippi Department of Education, (MDE). Beginning in 2001, federal legislation paved the way for accountability models; although, each state is responsible for developing and implementing a specific model to evaluate their respective schools (US Dept. of Education, 2002). The Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016 (MPSAS) use an array of student and school outcomes to determine a scale score for each school and district; each school and district is then assigned a letter grade based upon cut scores established by MDE (MDE School and District Grading System, 2016). These ratings play a vital role in the public perception of schools, educators, and districts. The hope is these ratings will provide stakeholders in a community with information about school performance that is easily accessible and understandable, in order to inform decision-making regarding schools (MDE, 2016). As a result, districts, schools, administrators, faculty, and even students are held accountable for student proficiency, growth, and completion. School districts with schools consistently rated as low-performing may take varying levels of action in relation to school policies, curriculum design, assessment, as well as employment decisions regarding administrators and teachers.

Mississippi has a long and difficult history when it comes to public education, especially in regard to minority students and students living in poverty. While the MPSAS were created and implemented to promote academic success for students and schools, some of the factors being measured and rated may promote some of the long-standing inequities among low-performing and poverty-stricken schools and districts. These equity concerns are raised by the 2015-2016 results, as “A” rated school districts had an average of 25% minority students and 25% students of poverty, as opposed to “F” rated districts, where the average rate of minority students was 95% and the percentage of students in poverty was also 95 (MDE 2016 Accountability Report, 2016).

With the fate of schools and educators hinging on the results of these assessments, it is important for the accountability model to accurately and equitably assess school performance according to the established goals of student proficiency, growth, and completion. This research is a case study of the application of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016. This case documents the creation of the current system to the release of the 2015-2016 assessment results. The research addresses the specific details of the model, including how it was developed and what research or examples the model is based on. The case study also evaluates the accuracy and equity issues related to the measurement system the state uses to rate schools of Mississippi.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this case study of the Mississippi School Accountability System. This chapter begins with a description of the MSAS as the central issue of concern of the study. A justification of the need for the analysis is followed by a brief introduction of research on the topic of accountability systems in schools. Next, the

purpose of the research study is to analyze the MPSAS in terms of being an effective policy tool to accomplish MDE's stated goals as a contribution to the field of educational leadership.

Several research questions are presented to frame the data collection and analysis portions of the study. The chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as an overview of the remaining chapters.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools across the United States are increasingly tied to state-developed accountability systems intended to measure the effectiveness of schools in terms of educating students. As time has progressed, the American public has become increasingly accustomed to these systems including the standardized testing and reporting of achievement results. Yet, little attention is paid to the complex consequences of assessment systems as a measurement of student and school success. According to MDE, in Mississippi (2016), "The goal (of MPSAS) is to help parents and the public better understand how well a school is performing and to begin conversations to continually improve education" (p. 1). There are, however, issues created by a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of performance. The Mississippi Department of Education's website provides an explanation of the accountability system and explains the accountability grades as a representation of student performance and growth across several subject areas; yet, in the next paragraph, it states the grade is not an indicator of the performance of an individual student or teacher (2016). Although the rating is not tied to teacher or student performance, districts are redesigning curricula, implementing new policies, and making personnel decisions based on the results of these accountability ratings. Additionally, parents are making decisions about where to send their children to school and local communities are facing

very real consequences resulting from consistently low performance ratings. Finally, these scores may impact the ability of districts to hire and retain quality teachers and administrators. Although the MSAS has a range of potentially serious consequences, it is unclear if this model correctly identifies whether or not schools are succeeding in terms of the original goals of the state assessment policy.

The available information and initial assessment results raise questions along two distinct lines of thought: one, whether or not the model provides stakeholders, including community members, with accurate information about what is being measured and how it relates to overall school performance; and two, whether or not the accountability model may reaffirm social and economic inequities amongst Mississippi school districts. In terms of accuracy of information, while the model is up-front about what is being scored (i.e., Reading Proficiency), there is less discussion about how a criterion is scored or what it means for student or school performance. For example, while growth is measured for students in both reading and mathematics, there is also a growth measure for the students in the bottom quartile of the student population. While it may seem reasonable to measure the extent to which a school or district is promoting growth for the lowest-performing students, by assigning a score for the growth of all students and the growth of the lowest 25%, the outcomes for those lowest-performing students are measured twice. As a result, there is the potential for a scenario in which schools and districts emphasize strategies to promote growth of the lowest-performing students, which while not an unreasonable educational decision, may come at the expense of other students outside of the bottom 25%. In addition, differences of overall distribution means a high level of variability among districts in terms of the characteristics of the bottom 25%. The bottom 25% of students in high-performing

districts may range from students scoring in the first percentile through the 50th percentile; the bottom 25% in a low-performing district may range first percentile to the fifth percentile or so. Growth and achieving growth at the bottom of the national performance spectrum is much different than growth among students in the normal range.

In addition to concerns of accurately measuring school performance, the results of the MSAS raise questions concerning equity for schools across the state. Specifically, schools and districts serving a high percentage of minority students and/or students of poverty, perform worse in terms of accountability rating than schools with lower percentages of minority and/or poverty-stricken students (MDE, 2016). In addition, some of the outcomes being scored may unintentionally favor schools in wealthier areas. Isolated rural schools in high-poverty areas of Mississippi traditionally have fewer financial and personnel resources, which would make it difficult to add the necessary amount of dual-enrollment or AP courses in order to score highly on the “Acceleration,” outcome. Similarly, the “Readiness” factor is based on student performance on the ACT, which could again point to additional resources such as test-prep materials and/or courses, which may not be available in more poverty-stricken school districts. In addition, ACT scores are likely similar to other proficiency scores. The question becomes whether or not the accountability model merely highlights this discrepancy, or actually promotes some long-standing educational inequities in schools across Mississippi. If strong relationships exist between poverty and performance, there is evidence the system measures poverty, not performance. If this is true, the accountability model would not seem particularly useful as an assessment instrument, as the stated goals for implementation are not being achieved.

Existing research on school accountability such as Berliner (2009), Mathis and Trujillo (2016), as well as Howe and Murray (2015) provides evidence of a negative impact on schools and districts because of the recent shift toward standardized testing as a primary assessment of student and school success. According to Dotterweich and McNeal (2003), in response to the now infamous “A Nation at Risk” report in 1983, states across the country began to set new educational standards while also mandating standardized testing as a measure of student achievement. Due to the new emphasis on test results, Au (2007) notes a narrowing of school curriculum as teachers modify teaching methodology to promote success on standardized tests. While this idea has become commonplace in recent years, Johnson (2006) cited a survey in which 71% of teachers felt there was too much testing in today’s schools and the No Child Left Behind Act was actually creating more problems for schools. With these concepts in mind, it is vital to closely examine any statewide accountability system to ensure it is promoting student learning, rather than proving to be more of a hindrance.

Purpose of the Study

The Mississippi Statewide Accountability System was developed to improve the quality of public schools in the state through a measurement of student achievement outcome data. From a policy perspective, a key issue is the ability of the MSAS, as a measurement instrument, to achieve this purpose. The purpose of this case study is to examine the new model and analyze it for accuracy, equity, and consequences in terms of supporting improvements of student achievement in Mississippi schools. This context for the case, plus a critical discussion of the model as it relates to long-standing inequity among the public schools of Mississippi, will provide critical details for policymakers, school leaders, and concerned citizens to take a hard

look at the progress of public education in Mississippi and assess whether it is trending in a positive direction to the benefit of students, educators, and communities statewide.

This case study explores the accuracy, equity, and consequences of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016 in order to provide state-level policymakers, district and building administrators, parents, and community members with an in-depth analysis of the tool being used to evaluate schools and districts. The information described in this analysis could be used to engage stakeholders in collaborative conversations about school performance in Mississippi and how to approach the issue while maintaining a focus on student learning and growth, rather than merely standardized testing results. The study also adds to the research-based understanding of assessment and accountability as measures of school performance within the field of the study of school leadership. In regard to Mississippi, this specific qualitative case study provides contextual details regarding the accountability model and its role within the state's educational system. The students, educators, and community stakeholders in Mississippi exist within a uniquely complex environment and this specific case study examines this context to provide a unique perspective on accountability systems and their impact on students, teachers, schools, and communities.

Research Questions

In order to understand the Mississippi accountability model, the following research question will guide the data collection and analysis. The central research question for this case study is:

Is the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System an effective policy tool to accomplish the stated goals of (1) promoting public understanding of school performance and (2) improving performance of schools and districts?

From the central research question, several sub-questions will also be considered for the purposes of the study:

1. Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?
2. Based on the 2016 MSAS results and the intended purpose, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?
3. Based on data from interviews with stakeholders, what is the perceived impact on local communities stemming from the 2016 results?

Overview of Design

As public education in the United States has become more oriented on standardized testing, much of the analysis of school effectiveness is based in quantitative evaluation of student and school achievement data. Creswell (2009), however, highlights the value of qualitative research as a method of describing the complex nature of specific environments, while also interpreting the specific reactions to events in said environment. To that end, a qualitative case study of the MSAS not only provides insight into the complex culture of the public education system in Mississippi, but also provides a lens through which the impact of specific policies on local students, educators, and communities is analyzed. As a case study, the researcher is the primary research instrument and, as such, there are inherent biases and interpretations based in

the researcher's experiential background. Therefore, a reflexive approach was used for the duration of this study, in addition to the use of transparency to validate the findings of the research. According to the concept of emergent design, the researcher in this case was open to changes in perspectives and outcomes as the data was collected and analyzed (2009).

Outline and Format of the Study

This research is a case study using elements of document analysis, interviews with stakeholders and experts, and quantitative research methods to explore the process of implementation of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016. Chapter two addresses key literature and research relevant to educational accountability systems, assessment, and student achievement. The third chapter explains the specific research methodology for the study, including the data collected and the methods used for analysis. For this particular case study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from document analyses, stakeholder interviews, and the 2015-2016 achievement results were used to triangulate the research questions. Chapter four consists of a description of the data analysis ranging from document analysis to the results of the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System for 2016. Chapter five contains the research findings and provides implications for the study of educational leadership. Also included is a list of policy recommendations to be considered for future discussions regarding the public school accountability system in Mississippi.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When attempting to measure the validity of an accountability system, such as the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System and the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2016, it is important to use existing literature in the realm of education and accountability to provide a framework lens through which to critically analyze the model. To that end, this chapter will describe key literature across the following concepts, through which the current Mississippi accountability model will be analyzed:

- The history of accountability and measurement in US schools, also in Mississippi, specifically.
- The relationship between poverty and student achievement

Accountability and Measurement in US Schools

While standardized testing-based accountability systems are a relatively new phenomena, American policymakers have been seeking methods for measuring school and student success for almost half a century. In fact, Brookhart (2013) actually divides the history of accountability testing in the United States into three eras beginning in the 1970's with the Minimum Competency movement, which later gave way to the Standards-Based Reform movement in the mid 1980s, before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) brought the current period of standardized testing to evaluate students and schools. Whether it was the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957 by the Soviet Union prompting a renewed emphasis on science and mathematics education,

or recent downward trends amongst US students in comparison to students of other nations on international achievement assessments, social and political issues have driven government leaders to address the need for reform in US public schools. As a result, education reformers now use standardized testing programs as a technique to evaluate the success and or shortcomings of reform efforts.

According to Dorn (1998), the general public predominantly showed little interest in measuring the academic success of students through standardized testing until the 1970s. After the release of the now infamous *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which documented how students in the United States were rapidly falling behind those of other nations, individual states responded by redesigning their curriculum standards and creating mandatory standardized testing programs (Dotterweich & McNeal, 2003). With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the US Federal government implemented unprecedented regulations and guidelines for state education systems. The new emphasis on the results of standardized testing has led to an ever-increasing pressure to reform underperforming schools and districts; although, Fullan (2007) argues the reality of effective school reform has not yet caught up to the demand. While it is safe to say NCLBA has garnered a great deal of criticism, such as one particular study by Johnson (2006) in which 70% of respondents stated NCLBA was actually causing problems in schools, the regulations associated with the law have forced individual states, Mississippi included, to reexamine their approach to public education and redesign the manner in which they attempt to implement quality systems to promote student learning and achievement.

Accountability in Mississippi. The history of public schools in Mississippi is checkered with issues of segregation and poverty and the state has typically ranked at or near the bottom in most education-related categories. Like many other states, though, NCLBA has forced the Mississippi Department of Education to critically examine its public school system and implement policies attempting to bridge many long-standing achievement gaps. While Mississippi schools are certainly making positive strides, indecision and inconsistency at the state level has further hampered reform efforts. For example, the 2015-2016 academic year represented the third year in a row in which the Statewide Accountability Program was measured using a different assessment tool. MDE measured school success and/or failure in those school years using the MCT2, PARCC, and finally the Mississippi Assessment Program, which makes statistical comparisons almost impossible, excluding the difficult task of teachers and administrators to structure their classrooms around an ever-changing set of standards (Royals, 2016).

Accountability Models and Validity. According to Howe and Murray (2015), Mississippi is one of 16 states in the U.S. using a report card-style system, which aggregates student achievement data to get a scale score, which is then assigned a A-F letter grade. The purpose of these systems is to provide stakeholders, whether faculty and administration or parents and other community members, with digestible information about student achievement and overall school performance for specific schools and districts to guide their interaction and decision-making. Each of these 16 states use standardized testing programs to score students across a proficiency scale, although the number of levels used in each system vary from state to state, with Mississippi assigning students to one of four levels: minimal, basic, proficient, and

advanced. Each state varies in the manner in which they assess student achievement and the outcomes being measured. Arkansas, for instance, only measures three outcomes, whereas New Mexico measures 18 (2015). There is also a great deal of variance between the states in regards to the formula being used to calculate performance, as different states may give varying statistical weight to the student achievement outcomes. Mississippi's model even varies based on the type of school being assessed, as schools with a 12th grade (high schools or K-12 schools) are assessed using a 1000-point scale, but schools without a 12th grade (elementary and middle schools) are scored using a 700-point scale.

A key issue of contention in regards to state-by-state accountability models, is the extent to which each individual model is a valid measure for providing useful data to assess the goals of implementation for said models. Haertel and Herman (2005) describe the difficulty in using standardized tests as a valid measure of student learning, as tests, "can only measure a part of what students are learning" (p. 22) meaning the results of these tests, "provide only an imperfect estimate of student performance" (p. 23). Legally, the issue of standardized testing and validity was addressed by the case, *Debra P. v. Turlington*, 644 F.2d 397 (5th Cir. 1981). The ruling in this case provides a state is required to go to "substantial lengths to document the validity of tests given" (as cited in Alexander & Alexander, 2009). This difficult standard is furthered by the accepted reality that many factors playing a role in a student's academic achievement are not directly related to the school or its methods of assessment and measurement. In fact, Marzano (2000) demonstrates a school has a very limited impact on individual achievement. Furthermore, Hoy & Miskel (2008) state, "Much of what occurs in schools must be interpreted in the context

of the school's culture" implying the educational environment may play a more pivotal role in student achievement than testing and measurement.

In terms of data collection, schools and districts have much more access to student and teacher outcome information than ever before, yet the interpretation and application of said data may still be lacking. Byrk (2015) actually claims school reform efforts have failed to keep up with the rapid collection of data and lack, "explicit theory on how to improve" (p. 468). This gap certainly has an impact on the development and implementation of accountability systems across the United States. For Snow (2015), if educators and researchers could collectively develop more effective measures of what is actually happening in classrooms, student outcomes could be replaced, which would have a drastic impact on the development of accountability systems moving forward. Overall, there remains a great deal of uncertainty regarding the validity and reliability of existing accountability systems.

Impact of Poverty on Student Achievement. While a host of factors undoubtedly influence the academic achievement of students and subsequently the accountability performance of schools and districts, poverty has long proven to play a huge role in educational outcomes. A report by the United States Department of Education (2013) stated, "students from high-poverty backgrounds are at a greater risk of academic failure," while also pointing out a growing achievement gap between students at differing income levels. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) *The Condition of Education 2016* report described an achievement gap of 32 points between schools with both high and low rates of poverty-affected students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Berliner (2012) points out since income inequality has a distinct effect on society as a whole, schools, as well as their communities, will

also feel this impact. More specifically to schools, Kahlenberg (2001) found a statistical link between student outcomes and students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch, which has become a common characteristic to measure student poverty.

While many schools and districts are enacting a host of reform efforts aimed at improving teacher quality and instructional practice, for example, one of the most effective predictors of student success could lie outside the school's realm of influence. In fact, Stitzlein (2015) claims U.S. public schools are often saddled with the immense task of solving the ongoing problems of society, a reality which seems both unfair and bordering on impossible. This adds to work by Fleischman and Heppen (2009) describing the challenge of improving underperforming schools because of the wide array of variables associated with student academic success. While the most recent renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) makes mention of an intent to close achievement gaps and promote equity, a 2016 report indicates many variations between the goals of ESSA and the realities of implementation, specifically within families affected by poverty (ESSA, 2016).

Poverty and Achievement in Mississippi. If poverty is one of the more accurate predictors of a student's success or failure in terms of academics, Mississippi as a state is in a perilous position, even in comparison to other southeastern states. Southern Education published an article in 2007 examining the how many southern states now had a majority of students in public schools classified as low-income (Southern Education, 2007). In this article, Mississippi is highlighted as being the only state in the nation with a majority of its public school students labeled as low-income as of 1989 at 59%; although, that percentage had ballooned to 75% as of 2006 (2007). While the nationwide poverty rate in 2016 is 20%, Mississippi is well above that

number at 29% (NCES, 2016). According to the NCES' National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) program, of the more than 490,000 public school students in Mississippi in 2016, 71% qualify for free or reduced lunch (NCES NAEP State Profile, 2016). With Mississippi ranking poorly in a wide set of state-by-state education rating publications, such as Education Week's annual *Quality Counts Report* (Ed Week, 2017) which ranked Mississippi as 50th out of 51 education systems in the United States in both 2016 and 2017, as well as website Wallethub, which ranked them 46th (Bernardo, 2016), it is quite clear the prevalence of poverty could be negatively impacting student achievement outcomes.

Leonard and Box (2009) conducted a study examining the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and the accreditation rankings in Mississippi, which determined schools with higher populations of low SES students suffered in terms of accreditation rankings, while the opposite also proved true, with schools with more high SES students consistently performing at a higher level. Additionally, Johnson (2005) aggregated student achievement data for Mississippi students for three consecutive years and compared this information to level of human and financial resources available to schools and districts, concluding student achievement closely corresponded to the resources available to a school or district. It would seem apparent students across the state of Mississippi are more likely to be affected by poverty than in most other states across the US, which, since poverty has been clearly associated with decreasing student performance outcomes, seems to place a huge socio-political burden on educators across the state to make stark improvements with little access to the necessary resources.

Poverty in Rural Schools. Poverty also proves to play a key role in the education of students in rural areas, which make up a large portion of the public school population in

Mississippi. According to Kirby (2003) rural students are more likely than their urban counterparts to be impacted by poverty. The geographic isolation and subsequent lack of resources and diverse personnel create difficult challenges for rural schools seeking to promote students' academic improvement (Johnston, 2009). These schools often have difficulty hiring and retaining quality teachers (Hargreaves, Parsley, & Cox, 2015) and as a result often end up hiring teachers with less experience (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012).

Additionally, research demonstrates many rural, poverty-stricken schools are greatly impacted by a lack of resources, whether physical or human. Diner (1982) noted test scores which, highlighted students who were at a disadvantage due to an unequal education system resulting from a lack of resources. A study of financial equity in school districts in the state of Nevada showed that funding inequities created opportunity gaps, which negatively impacted poor districts (Verstegen, 2015). Sciarra and Hunter (2015) build on this issue with the claim, "adequate resources are prerequisites to building the capacity of schools" (p. 3). If a lack of funding leads to opportunity gaps and hinders the ability to build capacity in schools, a state such as Mississippi with significant funding-related issues is not well-positioned to promote academic improvement of schools and students.

A quick glance at the bottom-15 school districts in Mississippi according to the 2015-2016 MSAS results will draw immediate connections to this existing research, as many of these struggling districts are in geographically-isolated, poverty-stricken communities. If research clearly demonstrates poverty is a major indicator of student academic success and is more likely to affect students in rural schools and districts, and the state of Mississippi ranks among the top of US states in terms of students of poverty, is it any real surprise the school districts who are

struggling under the current accountability system are predominantly rural districts with high degrees of student poverty?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale

This research is a case study analysis examining the accuracy, equity, and consequences of the 2016 MSAS as a measure of student and school success in terms of meeting the intended goals. This study of construct validity examined the role the new accountability model plays in fostering or reducing inequities amongst the schools and students of the state of Mississippi. In order to answer the research questions, this study will analyze the model itself and any associated documents, conduct focus group interviews with key stakeholders involved in the creation or implementation process, and administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members from school districts across the state. The data will be analyzed to respond to the central research question:

Is the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System an effective policy tool to accomplish the stated goals of (1) promoting public understanding of school performance and (2) improving performance of schools and districts?

Expanding the central research question, several sub-questions will be considered:

1. Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?

2. Based on the 2016 MSAS results and the intended purpose, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?
3. Based on data from interviews with stakeholders, what is the perceived impact on local communities stemming from the 2016 results?

Research Design

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative inquiry has become more mainstream as a reputable form of scientific methodology and, therefore, does not require the same degree of effort to prove its capability and usefulness. With that said, it is still beneficial for qualitative researchers to describe the impetus for using qualitative methodology when conducting research. Stake (2010) describes all qualitative inquiry as interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic, providing a useful window into the realm of modern educational research. In regard to this particular study, an investigation into the accuracy, equity, and consequences stemming from the MSAS make a case study an appropriate methodology as the accountability model created by MDE to measure the schools and districts of Mississippi is a specific instance, impacting a specific group of people (Stake, 1995). Although the MSAS measures and rates the schools and districts of Mississippi, the impact of this system stretches beyond just the students and educators within a given school system to the communities and community members who, either directly or indirectly, interact with these school systems on a regular basis; therefore, there are critical historical, economic, and social elements related to the MSAS, which play a role in the discussion of the system as whole and strengthens the argument for a case study analysis (Creswell, 2009). This case is an investigation into a specific event with no specified hypothesis being addressed, used data collection descriptive in nature, and adhered to the concept of

emergent design, all of which point to the usefulness of qualitative methodology for this particular research study (2009, p. 195).

Defining the Accountability Criteria

In order to assess the extent to which the MSAS effectively measures the stated policy goals, it is necessary to define the criterion indicators being used to rate schools and districts. Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, Mississippi schools or districts with a grade 12 were assessed using nine components of evaluation, then in the 2015-2016 school year, two additional components were added. The following section will briefly define each component of the rating system to provide a more detailed approach to the analysis. The components are:

1. Reading Proficiency (100 points)
2. Reading Growth – All students (100 points)
3. Reading Growth – Lowest performing students (100 points)
4. Math Proficiency (100 points)
5. Math Growth – All students (100 points)
6. Math Growth – Lowest performing students (100 points)
7. Science Proficiency (50 points)
8. U.S. History Proficiency (50 points)
9. Graduation Rate – All students (200 points)
10. College & Career Readiness (Math 50% and English/Reading 50%) (50 points)
11. Acceleration (Participation & Performance Combined) 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): Participation – 50% /Performance – 50% (50 points)
(MDE MPSAS, 2016)

Proficiency. The indicators measuring “Proficiency” (components one, four, seven, and eight) are simply a percentage of the total number of students who score either proficient or above on their grade level in the specified subject area (Reading, Math, Science, U.S. History). For instance, if a district had 60% of its students score either proficient or advanced on the reading assessment, the district would receive 60 of the possible 100 points for Reading Proficiency. The same process is used for Math, Science, and U.S. History; however, Science and U.S. History are worth 50 points toward the total scale score, rather than 100 points, as students are tested in these subject areas less frequently (Science in 5th and 8th grade; U.S. History in 11th grade).

Growth. For components referencing “Growth,” this measure is calculated using the performance level categories assigned by MDE. Four main categories of performance levels are used for organizing student achievement, with two of those four also being divided into two subcategories. The performance levels used by MDE are: Advanced, Proficient, Basic (divided into High-Basic and Low-Basic), and Minimal (divided into High-Minimal and Low-Minimal). For a student to achieve “Growth” in a given subject area, he or she would need to either remain at the performance level from the previous year, as long as it is proficient or above, or improve from one performance level to a higher level, or to a higher sub-level within either the Basic or Minimal performance level from the previous school year’s assessment results. This measurement, which applies to components two, three, five, and six, is once again measured as a percentage of the total student population at a given school or district.

Similarly, “Growth for the lowest performing students,” is calculated in the same manner, but rather than using the entire student population as the denominator, only students who are in the bottom 25% of their class within a particular subject area are used in the calculation. For instance, a school with 100 students in a seventh grade mathematics course would rank the students by score on the previous year’s mathematics assessment from highest to lowest and take the lowest quartile, or 25 students, and put their data through the same procedures to measure “growth” to determine the “Math Growth for the Lowest Performing Students.”

It is important to note, these students are essentially being scored twice in Math and twice in Reading (note: these groups of students are not necessarily the same, as the low 25% in Math may have little to no carryover to the low 25% in Reading), yet these lower-quartile students account for 80% of aggregate growth scores of a school or district. This is due to the fact 25% of the 100 possible points in components two (Reading Growth) and five (Math Growth), as well as 100% of the 100 possible points in components three (Reading Growth – Lowest performing students) and six (Math Growth – Lowest-performing students) are generated by 25% of the students (bottom quartile). Thus, the bottom quartile of students in Reading and Math are responsible for 62.5% of the points based on growth in both areas (25% of students account for 250 out of 400 possible points). By comparison, the top three quartiles of students in Reading and Math account for only 37.5% of the points (150 of 400) attributed to growth in Reading and Math. Because there are three times as many students in the top three quartiles, the growth of each student in the bottom quartile accounts for five times as much growth as each student in the top three quartiles:

$$(.625/.25)/(.375/.75) = 5$$

The data is further skewed in these components because performance characteristics of the bottom quartile will likely vary depending on the overall proficiency level of a school or district. Simply, lower proficiency schools and districts will likely have lower aggregate scores in the bottom quartile because of a high percentage of students with severe learning deficiencies.

Graduation Rate. The next component of the MSAS calculation is a school or district's graduation rate, which is simply the percentage of students at the specified institution who fulfill the criteria for graduation within the state of Mississippi. It is important to note, however, there are several nuances involved with calculating a school or district's graduation rate. To start, when a group of students begin the ninth grade at a school, a "cohort snapshot" is taken to represent that particular group of students as they progress through high school. Four years later, this same snapshot is used to calculate the graduation rate as a simple percentage of the students in the cohort who did complete the requirements for graduation and earn a diploma. Students who leave a school or district will not be counted against this calculation, as long as the school has documentation of a records request from the school or district into which the student transferred. Students who are considered non-graduates and count against the graduation rate could fit a number of descriptors, such as students who take five years from their entrance into the ninth grade to graduate, students who earn an occupational diploma, certificate of attendance, or GED, as well as students who drop out of school before completing their graduation requirements. It is also worth noting, this particular component is weighted at 200 points, which is two to four times higher than the weight of other components in the calculation.

Acceleration. The "Acceleration" component of the MSAS measures the percentage of students in a given school or district eligible for participating in an Advanced Placement or a

Dual-Enrollment course who actually participate in a course. This percentage is modified by the percent passing the associated assessment for an accelerated course, whether an Advanced Placement or a Dual-Enrollment course. The indicator has a set time-period over which the “Participation” and “Performance” aspects of the acceleration measurement will be phased into the model. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, participation will count for 70% of the component score versus 30% for student performance. This transitions to 60% participation and 40% performance in 2016-2017 and finally, 50% participation and 50% performance in 2017-2018. There are also specific measurements regarding what constitutes “performance” based on the type of accelerated course being taken. For example, in a dual enrollment/dual credit course, a student must pass the course with a “C” or above, whereas for an AP course, a student must achieve a score of three or better on the particular AP exam to be included in the “performance” calculation. The total number of students meeting the “performance” requirements will then be divided by the total number of students taking an accelerated course of any type to get the score for this particular indicator. In addition, students taking multiple accelerated courses are given additional statistical weights when being counted based on the number of courses in which they are participating. As an example, if a district had 100 students eligible for an AP or Dual-Enrollment course, but only 50 students took the course, with only 40 of those students meeting the standard of “passing,” during the initial 2015-2016 school year, the 35 “participation points” ($50 \times .70 = 35$) would be added to the 12 “performance points” ($40 \times .30 = 12$) for a total of 47, which is then divided by two, since the total component score is worth 50 points, rather than 100. The district would receive 23.5 points on the “Acceleration” component out of 50 possible points. Similarly, if the district had the same number of students participating and passing in the

2017-2018 school year, the district would only garner 22.5 points, as Participation and Performance are weighted equally at 50% each. Due to the phasing in of the “Performance” component, it would initially be beneficial for a district to have as many students as possible taking an AP or Dual-Enrollment course, with less emphasis on those students passing the course; although by the 2017-2018 school year, this advantage would no longer exist.

College and Career Readiness. The tenth indicator, “College and Career Readiness,” is a measure in support of the Mississippi State Legislature requirement that all Mississippi public school students take the ACT during their junior year of high school, which is funded by the Legislature. Using the results of the ACT, students’ scores in Math and English/Reading are equally combined into one score, worth 50 points toward the MSAS rating. According to MDE (2016) the Benchmark cut scores as of September of 2013 were 18 for English, 22 for reading, and 22 for mathematics. Students who meet these cut scores will be included in the numerator and divided by the total number of students in the “Senior Snapshot,” which is the measurement of all Mississippi students prior to the completion of the fourth year of high school.

Table 1

Assignment of Grade Classifications for 2015-2016

Low-End Score		Grade		High-End Score
		A	\geq	695
623	\leq	B	$<$	695
540	\leq	C	$<$	623
422	\leq	D	$<$	540
		F	$<$	422

Note. Adapted from Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016, (MDE MPSAS, 2016).

Once all of this information is collected according to the processes above, each school and district is assigned a composite score, which is then applied to the scale score as seen in Table 1 to correspond to a specific letter grade, which is then reported as public information.

Sources and Analyses of Data

Research for this study was gathered from a host of sources, including both primary and secondary sources. The data collection was divided into three distinct sections, Phase One, Phase Two, and Phase Three, which each corresponded to a specific type of data collected and analyzed. Phase One consisted of a document analysis and, though the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016 was one of the primary sources of information, additional documents associated with the model, research from books, academic journals, and online databases were also examined. This information is used to identify details related to the background and creation of the MSAS and provides insight into the purpose of the assessment and the logic behind each component in achieving stated policy goals. In addition to the document analysis, the researcher conducted interviews with key stakeholders involved in the process of developing and implementing the new model in Mississippi. This data is used, along with the results of the document analysis, to investigate the accountability model and the reasoning behind its creation and implementation.

For Phase Two of the data collection process, the district achievement results for the 2015-2016 school year was statistically analyzed for any significant correlations or group comparisons of interest. For instance, a Pearson's r correlational analysis was used to identify significant relationships between district level variables and differences among specific group's indicators based on student demographics. One analysis determined whether a statistical

relationship exists between an independent variable such as race/ethnicity of students in a particular district and one of the rating indicators such as Math Proficiency, which would serve as the dependent variable. Another example analyzed correlational data between the rankings associated with the MSAS and the district achievement gap data released by MDE. These and other quantitative procedures add considerable information to the discussion of the MSAS' effectiveness as a policy instrument and further the response to the central research questions.

Finally, Phase Three consisted of conducting interviews with parents and community members from several of the highest performing and several of the lowest performing districts around the state in regard to their perceptions of the accountability model and its impact on their schools and communities. These interviews document first-hand experiences with educators and community members to correspond with the document analysis to understand the impact the model has on public schools (and the communities they serve) in the state of Mississippi.

Phase One. To begin this research study, a document analysis examined the accountability model and all related documents. This corresponds to the first research sub-question:

Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?

All of the factors measured are identified, the manner in which those factors are scored, and the weights given to particular outcomes. First, it was important to investigate the development of the MSAS document as it provides the framework through which all other decisions were enacted. Next, the analysis of the stated purposes of the MSAS, the logical reasoning behind the

creation of the system and the intended goals are revealed. From there, key decisions regarding the processes of the system were examined including what components were chosen for measurement, how cut-off points for scale scores were selected, and how the ratings were assigned. Once the model itself was researched, other related documentation released by MDE in regards to the accountability system was reviewed. As an example, MDE's website was perused because it contains a link to an "explainer" document, which discusses the grading system, highlighting the legal background for implementing the system, the goals of the grading system, as well as information about what the grades do and do not represent (MDE, 2016). Looking at this documentation and other associated press releases or addendums, provided clarity to the intent of the system, creating a lens used to critically approach the central research question regarding the fidelity of the system as an effective policy tool to achieve the stated goals of school improvement. For example, did any of the released information about the system mention the nature and design of the measurement being used? Did MDE make mention of the issue of inequity amongst the schools of Mississippi or the pressures the system may create for certain communities? The response to these questions facilitated a deeper understanding of the central research question. It was also be beneficial to examine any responses the system as a policy tool, either from policymakers, educational professionals, or journalists. These elements provided additional evidence crucial to accomplishing the goals of this case study. A comprehensive analysis of the model and any related documentation provided useful insight into the justification and goals of the model which was critically analyzed for fidelity in regard to the research questions.

A critical component of most qualitative research is information gathered directly from the people involved in the study. As the stated goal of this case study was to examine the MSAS as an effective policy tool for the goals of school improvement stated by MDE, the researcher sought to gather anecdotal information about the model from the individuals who helped develop and implement the system. In regards to the development of the model, it was beneficial to begin within the Office of District Accreditation, within the Division of Research and Development at MDE, as this office is responsible for releasing the MPSAS documentation. Reaching out to Paula Vanderford, who is listed as the Executive Secretary for the Commission on School Accreditation, or any members of the commission was the starting point. In addition, Dr. J.P. Beaudoin, who at the time served as the Chief of the Division of Research and Development, also provided insight about the model, as well as additional contacts who were involved in the development process. These initial contacts led to additional individuals who had a more direct role in the creation of the model.

When interviewing those involved with developing the new model, the site of the interview varied depending on the availability of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting with the researcher audio-recording the conversation while simultaneously taking written notes throughout the conversation. Once the setting for the interview had been determined, the researcher began by thanking the interview subject for their time commitment and briefly explaining the nature and purpose of the research study. The interview began with a series of simple questions such as the following:

- What role did you play in the development of the MSAS?
- Who were the leaders involved in the creation of the MSAS?

- What goals, if any, were discussed at the outset of the development of the MSAS?

These questions were designed to be simple and assist the interviewee in developing a comfort level with the researcher and the conversation. From there, the researcher began to probe for more in-depth information using more specific and detailed questions, such as the following:

- What, if any, other state models were used as examples in the development process?
- What research or theory, if any, was used in developing the model?
- How were determinations about key aspects of the model, such as the components being measured or scale cut-scores for assigning grades, decided upon?
- To what extent are you and others involved in the development of this model pleased with the system and the resulting outcomes?

These questions were designed to be open-ended and create opportunities for the interviewee to provide additional background and context to add to the data set. Throughout the interview, the researcher provided opportunities for member-checking by allowing the subject to clarify any of their answers or agree or disagree with summarizations of data collected. At the completion of the interview, the researcher thanked the interviewee for their time and gathered contact information for follow-up. From there, the data was analyzed and organized according to thematic elements. Also, the interview subjects were divided into subgroups according to their reactions to the questions or the MSAS itself to further assist in polishing the data for analysis and implications. The raw data and the initial analyses were discussed with members of the researcher's dissertation committee as well as a fellow Ph.D. candidate for further validation. Overall, this data provided key insights into the creation and implementation aspects of the

accountability model and provide for useful analysis, especially in relation to the first research sub-question.

Phase Two. Next, the study includes an analysis of the 2016 school accountability results. This data will be designed to address the second research sub-question:

Based on the 2016 Mississippi Statewide Accountability System results and the intended purpose, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?

Using the data file provided by MDE, the researcher used quantitative methods to analyze the data for any significant correlations across the measured outcomes between school districts across Mississippi. Specifically, the researcher separated the districts into the 15 highest-performing and 15 lowest-performing districts in the state and compared for patterns, such as whether or not the top districts score similarly well on any particular outcomes, as opposed to the bottom districts. In addition, the data was analyzed to determine if any statistical relationships exist between the results and any school demographic information. For example, the research sought differences between assessed measures and demographic data, such as race or students in poverty. In this scenario, the demographic information (race/ethnicity or students of poverty) served as the independent variable and the indicator data, such as Reading Proficiency or Math Growth, served as the dependent variable. Any difference statistically significant at the .05 level, in which student race or poverty level predict a data outcome such as Reading Proficiency or Math Growth, is noted.

The quantitative analysis was divided into two statistical approaches, a profile analysis and a basic correlational analysis. A profile analysis is a multivariate analysis of variance between variables, where the dependent variables are measured on a similar scale. In this

instance, the independent variable was group membership in either the Top-15 or Bottom-15 school districts in Mississippi from the 2015-2016 results. The dependent variables were the various components of the MSAS, which are scaled as a percentage out of 100. The primary goal of this profile analysis was to measure the variance in scores across the eleven components of the MSAS between the Top-15 and Bottom-15 to identify patterns and whether or not any interaction between component scores interacted in this scenario.

Next, a correlation analysis was conducted using the performance of the Top-15 and Bottom-15 groups across the MSAS components. Specifically, the Readiness component was compared to both Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency to determine whether or not a statistically significant relationship existed. In the event of a strong positive correlation, there could be implications related to the construct validity of the accountability model, as it would imply the possibility of these components measuring the same skills and knowledge. While this study is primarily qualitative in nature, this portion of the analysis sought to provide a layer of quantitative data to be considered when assessing the accountability model in relation to the central research question of whether or not the MSAS is an appropriate policy tool for achieving the stated policy goals.

Phase Three. The study concluded with interviews with stakeholders within a few specific communities impacted by the MSAS. This data was specifically aimed at answering the third research sub-question:

Based on data from interviews with community-based stakeholders, what is the perceived impact on local communities stemming from the 2016 results?

To begin, contact was made with superintendents and community leaders (such as someone in the mayor's office or perhaps an individual working within the local Chamber of Commerce) to identify potential interviewees in each community. The researcher conducted four to five one-on-one interviews at six different sites; one each from three districts ranked in the top-15 and three districts ranked in the bottom-15 of the 2015-2016 Accountability results. The sites were chosen using purposeful sampling using certain criteria in order to add to the depth of the data. For instance, the three sites from each group vary in terms of their geographic location, the size of the district, as well as type of setting (urban/rural), which allowed for further comparison and analysis. These meetings included members representing different aspects of the local community, ranging from the business sector to local governance. This group also included parents of children in the district, local business owners, a member of the local clergy, and members of the media. The point was to gain a diverse perspective from community members invested in the success of the community (and subsequently the school district) to gain perspective on the impact of the MSAS.

The interviews were conducted using a phenomenological approach, as the interview data was an attempt to add in-depth information to the researcher's experiential data as well as the other data being analyzed in the course of this case study (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Each interview began with a brief introduction describing the scope and intent of the study, as well as the specific purpose and benefit of the interviews. The researcher made a point of thanking the participants for taking the time to be involved and addressed any issues of confidentiality or anonymity in regards to the data analysis and interpretation. This introduction also included a discussion of the goals of the study, specifically how the process is being used to

address the research sub-question mentioned above. The researcher attempted to focus the participants on their specific perceptions and interpretations of the MSAS and the impact it has on them as individuals and their communities, as opposed to creating a forum for a session to complain about other issues not related to the scope of this study.

In regard to the interview process, questions focused on two key aspects of the stated goals of MSAS, per MDE. First, whether or not the system provides the people of Mississippi with clear, useful information regarding the performance of the state's public schools and districts. For instance:

- To what extent do you understand the accountability model and the resulting grades?
- What does your school district's rating tell you about student and teacher performance?
- Do you feel your school district's grades accurately reflect the quality of the schools?

Secondly, questions were aimed at identifying the specific impact the MSAS has on specific communities across the state, in this case a selection of the highest and lowest performing school districts. Whereas the questions asked of those who developed the model were focused on the rationale and process behind the model's implementation, the questions to administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members were an attempt to identify the effect of the accountability results on individual districts, schools, and communities. For example:

- Do you think poor performance ratings have any negative impact on the local community?
- What are some non-academic factors that are potentially contributing to poor school performance?

This was useful in determining the extent to which the model achieves MDE's stated goal of providing members of a school community with information about school performance.

After each question was discussed to an appropriate length of time and each participant had the opportunity to provide their thoughts, the researcher took the time to member-check a summation of the answers provided. The interviewees had the chance to agree to the researcher's summative thoughts, or provide further clarity to their responses. In addition, at the conclusion of each interview, the researcher conducted an initial analysis of the data and coded it according to thematic elements. For example, the researcher recorded whether or not specific aspects of the accountability system are difficult to understand, or whether the participants feel as though the MSAS results directly impact specific areas of their local community, like property values or business development. As a final measure of validating the data analysis, members of the researcher's dissertation committee as well as a fellow Ph.D. candidate were provided access to the data to check for any issues of bias in the analysis or interpretation.

The data collected in this phase of the study creates an additional layer of triangulation in connection with the other data sets analyzed to further address the central research question regarding the effectiveness of the accountability system as a policy tool. By collecting anecdotal data related to the MSAS' impact on individual communities, this data helped determine if the model is providing additional barriers to improvement and achievement in some of the lowest-performing districts in Mississippi.

Summary. In order to conduct this research study, the above procedures were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Mississippi for approval, specifically, the interview protocols and procedures used during the qualitative data collection

portions of Phase One and Phase Three. As of Tuesday, April 18, 2017, this request for study was approved as “Exempt” under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#2 and 4).

Qualitative Procedures

Emergent Design. One of the most essential aspects of qualitative inquiry is the concept of emergent design (Creswell, 2009) as the researcher must be able to continuously monitor the study throughout the duration and be willing to modify the boundaries of the study as needed. For instance, if while interviewing those involved in the creation of the MSAS, an unexpected pattern of responses points to the system being based on a model from a particular state, the researcher adjusted the line of questioning to reflect this new theme. Similarly, when analyzing the 2016 MSAS results, if a strong correlation is discovered to exist between a strong scale score in Math Growth – Lowest Performing students and a district’s Graduation Rate, the researcher was able to modify the statistical analysis to further explore this phenomenon. Finally, in regard to interviews, if the interviewees continued to refer to the damaging economic impact of a low performance rating on the MSAS on their communities, the researcher asked further questions on this topic to probe for a more in-depth understanding of this data set and its implications for the overall study.

Role of the Researcher. As this study is a case study based in qualitative methodology, the researcher is the primary research instrument. As such, there are certain issues of subjectivity to be considered as the data was gathered and analyzed for this study. As a former practitioner in several school districts in Mississippi, there are undoubtedly certain biases and experiential perspectives, which could play a role in the conclusions and implications of the study. As a former administrator in a small, rural school with a majority of students qualifying

for access to free and reduced lunch programs, the researcher was exposed to the harsh realities of an ever-changing, complex accountability system, as well as the frustrations of serving as an administrator in a district with consistently low ratings. These experiences make it difficult for the researcher to enter this research study without certain biases regarding MDE and the MSAS, but in the interest of conducting quality research and creating a dialogue about school improvement in Mississippi, every attempt was made to exhibit reflexivity and transparency throughout the course of the study. Though the researcher may have preconceived beliefs about the MSAS in terms of the impact on school improvement, the opportunity to design and implement an effective analysis was not wasted. It is critical to be transparent and open throughout every step of the research process in order to combat the issues of personal bias (Stake, 2010).

Validity of Analysis. In order to conduct a research study that holds up against issues of bias and subjectivity, several accepted procedures were included in the data collection and analysis to maintain reflexivity and accuracy of the information being collected and the interpretation of this data. First, all data, from a variety of sources and methods, was triangulated as a step toward validating the conclusions. Next, in regard to the collection of interview data, member-checking procedures were implemented to ensure accuracy and conclusions about thematic phenomena. During the course of the interviews, opportunities were provided for participants to clarify their answers, including points at which the researcher tried to summarize the information and allowed the participants the chance to agree or disagree (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Additionally, once the data had been transcribed and organized, the researcher provided participants the opportunity to see the data analysis and make comments

(Creswell, 2009); although, as described by Stake (2010), in many situations the researcher provided participants with the opportunity to respond without a follow-up session or interview. In addition, the researcher's dissertation committee and a fellow Ph.D. candidate in the researcher's department had opportunities throughout the study to check the data collection, analysis, and conclusions for trustworthiness. By implementing these protocols, the researcher accounted for any issues of conflict or bias regarding the research.

Conclusion

According to Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996), the purpose of qualitative inquiry is not to collect data with the purpose of developing generalizations that are true of the entire population, but instead to focus on the data and implications surrounding a specific scenario. With this concept in mind, this case study analysis is not intended to serve as a focal point on the discussion of accountability and assessment in public schools across the country, but rather it organized and analyzed the available data to investigate the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System in relation to the central research question of whether or not the system acts as an effective policy tool to provide accessible information about school performance and guiding school improvement in Mississippi. By collecting varying types of data from several sources, the researcher provides several reasonable conclusions about the system as a whole, and adds to the conversation about public school accountability in Mississippi, especially in terms of equity for all students and positive outcomes for local communities across the state.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to note the findings from the data collection portion of this research project, which was divided into three separate sections: Phase One, Phase Two, and Phase Three. These sections were used to answer the central research question associated with this study:

Is the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System an effective policy tool to accomplish the stated goals of (1) promoting public understanding of school performance and (2) improving performance of schools and districts?

From the central research question, three, more specific research sub-questions were used to guide the data collection and analysis of the study:

1. Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?
2. Based on the 2016 MSAS results and the intended purpose, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?
3. Based on data from interviews with stakeholders, what is the perceived impact on local communities stemming from the 2015-2016 results?

Phase One consisted of collecting documentation associated with the development and implementation of the MSAS, as well as conducting interviews with individuals involved in the development process. Phase Two of the study consisted of conducting a quantitative analysis of the 2015-2016 results of the MSAS. Finally, Phase Three of the study consisted of interviewing individuals from communities across the state, which were selected using purposeful sampling, from three communities where the local school district was ranked in the Top-15 in the state, as well as three communities where the school district was ranked in the Bottom-15 in the state, according to the 2015-2016 results.

Phase One

Document Analysis. Phase One of the data collection process began with a document analysis of any documentation associated with the development of the MSAS. The documents analyzed for this portion of the study include, (1) the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016 (MDE, 2016); (2) Mississippi Senate Bill 2396 (MS Legis., 2013); (3) A Review of the Accountability Standards of the Mississippi Department of Education (PEER, 2015), which was a report conducted by the Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER); (4) the response to the PEER report by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE, 2015); as well as four documents from MDE's Mississippi Accountability Communications Toolkit, including, (5) Mississippi School and District Grading System (MDE, 2016); (6) Important Facts about School and District Accountability (MDE, 2016); (7) How do Schools/Districts Earn Points (MDE, 2016); and (8) Family Guide to the MAP Score Reports (MDE, 2016). Each of these documents was analyzed for patterns and themes in relation to the research sub—question:

Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?

Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016. (See Appendix A) This document is a thorough description of the system developed by the Office of School Accreditation within the Division of Research and Development of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The document begins with a brief history of accountability in public schools in Mississippi and then lists the membership details for the Commission on School Accreditation, who was responsible for developing the accountability model. Membership for this group includes three individuals from each of Mississippi's five congressional districts, each of which are appointed by the State Board of Education to serve a four-year term. These members include two teachers, two administrators, two superintendents, two local school board members, and seven non-education-affiliated individuals (MDE, 2016). The document describes the process of using the model to assess and rate schools and districts in Mississippi in addition to the specific components being scored as a part of the model. In response to the research sub-question, this particular document does not expressly state the reasoning behind specific aspects of the model; although, this document is useful for demonstrating the points of emphasis for those developing the model, as the point totals for determining a school and/or district's grade are listed. For example, Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of the point system by type of component, while also highlighting the percentage of the overall point total represented by each specific component.

Table 2.1

Scale Score Breakdown for MSAS Components

Type	Component	Points	Percentage of Total
Proficiency	Reading	100	10%
	Math	100	10%
	Science	50	5%
	U.S. History	50	5%
	Proficiency Total	300	30%
Growth	Reading	100	10%
	Math	100	10%
	Reading – Low 25%	100	10%
	Math – Low 25%	100	10%
	Growth Total	400	40%
Graduation Rate	Graduation Rate	200	20%
Other	College & Career Readiness	50	5%
	Acceleration	50	5%
	Other Total	100	10%

Note. Adapted from Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards for 2016, (MDE MPSAS, 2016).

As seen in Table 2.1, when the four proficiency components (Reading, Math, Science, and U.S. History) are combined, a district’s proficiency score accounts for 30% of the total scale score points. Similarly, the four growth components (Reading, Math, Reading Low 25%, Math Low 25%) make up 40% of a district’s total scale score output. Finally, Graduation Rate accounts for 20% of the score, with the College and Career Readiness and Acceleration components totaling 10% of the overall score. This information would seem to point to the points of emphasis in the development of the model, with student growth and proficiency making up 70% of a district’s total score. Additional conclusions can be drawn from within the types of components as well. For example, within the proficiency measures, Reading and Math account for 100 points and 10% of the total score each, whereas Science and U.S. History are each worth

only 50 points and 5% of the total score each. This is a product of the frequency with which each subject area is assessed throughout a student's public school career. For instance, Science is only assessed in the fifth and eighth grades, meanwhile U.S. History is only tested during a student's 11th grade year. By comparison, Reading (English-Language Arts) and Math are assessed annually from third grade to eighth grade, plus one additional assessment per subject area during high school (English II and Algebra I).

Mississippi Legislature Senate Bill 2396. (See Appendix B) This Bill, passed during the 2013 Regular Session of the Mississippi State Senate, was presented to the legislature by State Senator Gray Tollison as an amendment to the Mississippi Code of 1972 (Section 37-17-6) and allow the Mississippi Department of Education to develop a "Single "A" through "F" school and district accountability system satisfying Federal and State accountability requirements" (S. 2396, 2013). The aim of the bill was to transition the state's public school system from a nominal rating system to the report card-style system, using standardized testing results to measure student achievement and growth at schools and districts across the state. The three goals stated in the Senate Bill included all third grade students in Mississippi being on grade level in reading, reducing the dropout rate, and having 60% of students across the state scoring proficient or advanced on the Common Core State Standards (2013). Overall, Senate Bill 2396 appeared to have two primary themes, one being simplification. Under the bill, Federal and State level requirements would be incorporated into one system, with a simplified A-F rating system in order to make it easier to understand from the perspective of the general population. The second predominant theme of the bill was a general desire for improvement of the public schools in Mississippi. A set of new, raised expectations, as well as built-in standards increases when

initial goals are achieved demonstrate a commitment to moving the state’s public education system forward. For example, while the initial goal is for 60% of students to score proficient or advanced, if 75% of students achieve that level, or if 60% of the state’s schools are rated at a “B” level, new standards and expectations will be implemented.

Review of Accountability Standards of the Mississippi Department of Education. (See Appendix C) In 2015, the Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER), which is commissioned by the Mississippi Legislature to conduct investigations into any public entity supported by public funding, was given the task of conducting a review of the MDE’s accountability standards in regards to questions of whether or not the model was accurately describing the performance of Mississippi’s public schools. The review described all of the development aspects of the model, including the groups responsible for creating and implementing the model. At the conclusion of the review, PEER noted several concerns related to the accountability standards, which are listed below in Table 2.2. The final conclusion of the report states the accountability standards as currently implemented, “Do not provide stakeholders and the public with a clear picture of how Mississippi schools and districts are performing” (PEER, 2015).

Table 2.2

Complaints for MSAS from PEER Report

Issue	Specific problem	Recommendation
Effectiveness in measuring school performance	- Achievement categories obscure student score data	Report performance grades that reflect student assessment score data
	-Combining proficiency and growth into a single grade	Separate proficiency and growth into separate grades
	- Emphasis on growth fails to demonstrate actual performance - Growth multipliers are arbitrary	Indicate growth by student improvement, remove multipliers from score
Clarity and Accuracy of Presentation of Performance	- “Better of two years” and “Pausing” grades	Report “Paused” or “Waived” grade as well as official grade
	- Creating assessment benchmarks and cut-points is not criterion-based	Develop criterion for being “proficient”
	- Changes in graduation requirements	Ensure any changes made to graduation options are equivalent to regular high school diploma

Note. Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review. (2015). *A review of the accountability standards of the Mississippi department of education.*

Response to PEER Review by MDE. (See Appendix D) In response to the PEER report, which stated the accountability standards of the MDE were ineffective at providing accurate information related to the actual performance of schools and districts in Mississippi, MDE drafted a response, which specifically addressed each concern listed in the PEER report. MDE’s response claimed the PEER report was lacking in appropriate evidence to substantiate most of the claims made, while several of the misinterpretations found in the report may suggest a lack of in-depth review by appropriate experts with substantial knowledge of the fields of accountability and statistics. In fact, the majority of the line-item responses from MDE were centered on

widely-used, research-based statistical strategies associated with accountability and measurement systems in use across the country. Essentially, MDE was able to refute each claim with evidence-based protocols and methodologies, while also highlighting the noticeable lack of such evidence on the part of the PEER report. Some responses on the part of MDE were quite straightforward, such as the response to concerns about the “Pausing” or “Better of two years,” option for schools. While PEER recommended MDE publish both the reported grade as well as the “Paused,” or “Waived,” grade, MDE responded that all of this information was available on the department’s reporting website as well as through the official news release of the results (MDE, 2015). On the other hand, some of the responses were significantly more technical in nature and included advanced statistical methodologies to refute the PEER claims. Additionally, the MDE response included the attached CV’s and resumes of all of the experts involved in creating the accountability system and requested PEER respond in kind, as MDE expressed concern over the qualifications of those writing the PEER report.

Mississippi School and District Grading System. (See Appendix E) This document was created to serve as a brief explainer of the accountability system. Similarly to the aforementioned MPSAS 2016, this document began by identifying the new A-F system in accordance with state law, while also highlighting the goal of the model. Of note is the stated goal, “The goal is to help parents and the public better understand how well a school is performing and to begin conversations to continually improve education” (MDE, 2016). This document then gives several statements of what the grades do and do not represent. In terms of what *is* represented, the document gives a brief breakdown of each of the components being scored, although they are not directly spelled out. For instance, the first item listed is, “How well

students are performing in math and English language arts on state assessments,” rather than Math Proficiency or Reading Proficiency. More importantly, in regards to what is noted as what the school/district grades do *not* represent, the document lists the performance of individual students and teachers, as well as the other aspects of a school’s performance outside of the content areas being measured with state assessments, such as the, “Emotional/social or health needs,” of students or student performance in non-tested areas (English I, III, IV; World History; Government and Economics, etc.). Next, a list describes the types of people involved in the development of the model, with Higher Education faculty members and researchers noticeably left out. Additionally, the document has a list of methods by which parents may become more involved, including:

- Become aware of how well schools are performing in the community.
- Talk with teachers and school officials about how to help the school.
- Volunteer at school and engage in areas that need improvement.
- Ensure children have excellent attendance, complete all assignments, and are engaged in learning.

The document concludes with the grading scale for schools and districts and a table listing the Performance Level Classifications for schools and districts.

Important Facts about School and District Accountability. (See Appendix F) This document is a one-page, numbered list briefly noting the primary details of the MSAS. The document covers basic information such as noting the goal of the system and the reality it is required by state law. From there, the document highlights issues such as the various indicators making up the letter grade, while also pointing out the 2015-2016 results as the beginning of a

new era for accountability in Mississippi, with higher standards than previous models, and the belief that, while performance may suffer initially, the new, higher standards for achievement will eventually lead to increased student achievement (MDE, 2016).

Family Guide to the MAP Score Reports. (See Appendix G) This document was created to serve as a guide for families across Mississippi to correctly interpret the meaning of MAP score reports, including a breakdown of whether or not a student met the expectations to progress forward academically for the upcoming school year, and the definitions/implications associated with the various performance levels. Of particular note is a list at the conclusion of the document describing, “How the MAP score report can be used to enhance your child’s education” (MDE, 2016). Some of the details include improved instructional support and personalization on the part of teachers, as well as a reminder for parents to “check-in” regularly with teachers and a link to additional resources.

Development Interviews. In addition to the document analysis, several interviews were conducted with individuals with intimate knowledge of the development and implementation of the MSAS. Two of the individuals have served in various roles within the MDE and the third is a K-12 school administrator in Mississippi and serves as a representative on the Accountability Task Force established by MDE to assist in the development and ongoing improvement of the MSAS. None of these individuals will be directly identified, as the purpose of interviewing these individuals was to get detailed insights into the creation and implementation of the accountability model per the goals of this research project. The following questions were used to guide the interview with these individuals:

- What role did you play in the development of the MSAS?

- Who were the leaders involved in the creation of the MSAS?
- What goals, if any, were discussed at the outset of the development of the MSAS?
- What, if any, other state models were used as examples in the development process?
- What research or theory, if any, was used in developing the model?
- How were determinations about key aspects of the model, such as the components being measured or scale cut-scores for assigning grades, decided upon?

Interview #1 – Task Force Member. This particular individual mentioned several members of the Accountability Task Force and highlighted the importance of having representatives from all areas across the state working on the task force. When asked about the original goals in the development of the model, responses included revising the business rules for the accountability system, as well as an effort to improve the model in terms of ensuring it was fair and equitable for all schools and districts across the state. In terms of the examples and background research used to develop the new model, it was apparent the work of the Foundation for Excellence in Education and the current accountability model for the state of Florida were the primary frameworks involved in creating the Mississippi model. The Foundation for Excellence in Education is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Tallahassee, Florida, who is committed to the reversing recent downward trends for U.S. students on international assessments by promoting, “An education system that maximizes every student’s potential for learning and prepares all students for success in the 21st Century,” (Foundation for Excellence in Education, 2016). Little to no research on accountability was apparently conducted by the Task Force, as the Florida model was considered a successful and established model from which to base the project. Of particular note was the individual’s response to whether or not resulting

system was satisfactory, to which the participant responded, “Yes, but there is still work to be done.” From this individual’s perspective, there were still some issues and/or problem areas which needed to be addressed; however, at the time of the interview, there was no upcoming task force meeting scheduled by MDE.

Interview #2 – MDE Official. The second interview aimed at analyzing the development of the MSAS was conducted with a current MDE official with knowledge of the accountability model. This individual echoed several statements from the previous interview in regards to the people involved in the development process and the role the Florida model played in the development of the MSAS. This individual emphasized the current system as a, “Growth-toward-proficiency,” model aimed at providing schools and districts the opportunity to overcome low proficiency scores with results demonstrating increasing levels of growth across the different academic areas. When asked about the origins of the specific components being scored in this model, this individual mentioned the components existed before his/her time at MDE, but was aware the components were put in place by the State Board of Education during the 2014 legislative session. When asked about the outcome of this model, this individual stated it was, “Too early to tell,” but mentioned the upcoming scoring of the 2016-2017 results would be the, “First time to compare apples to apples,” after multiple years of data being incomparable due to several changes in the assessments. This individual also highlighted the importance of the Department of Education committing to using this specific model for multiple years in order to give the system a chance to work and provide useful comparison data. This official also noted an apparent prevalence of misinformation around the state regarding the accountability system and the subsequent grades. He/she mentioned that in addition to the public lacking basic information

about the model, many educators in districts across the state were also unfamiliar with the intricacies of the model, which has led to efforts on the part of MDE to promote mastery understanding through presentations and direct interactions with individual schools and districts.

Interview #3 – MDE Official. The final interview conducted in relation to the development of the MSAS took place at the MDE office in Jackson, Mississippi at the conclusion of the second interview. It is also necessary to note, the individual from the second interview joined the researcher and the third individual during the course of the third interview. According to this individual, who was working at MDE during the initial development of the new model in 2014, the original goals for the accountability system were twofold. First, MDE had received a lot of complaints regarding the Quality Distribution Index (QDI) and the cap on growth for high-performing schools/students. In light of these issues, the Mississippi legislature wanted to simplify the model and implement a system that was easy for citizens of the state to understand. At that time, the legislature passed Senate Bill 2396 (discussed in the document analysis), which mandated the creation of the current A-F report card-style accountability system. Of most value from this conversation was the discussion of the individual components and the various origins for each. For instance, some of the components are required by Federal regulations, specifically the proficiency calculations for English, math, and science, as well as the measurement of graduation rate. It was interesting to note, one initial proposal was to count graduation rate as 100 points toward the accountability model, but MDE was informed that was not enough to meet the Federal requirements, and the model as presently constructed counts graduation rate as 200 points, which is 20% of the total scale score for a district. On the other hand, the emphasis on the Bottom 25% is required by Mississippi State law. But perhaps the

most interesting portion of this conversation was the realization that the U.S. History proficiency measure is not required either by Federal regulation or Mississippi State law, but according to this individual, when discussions took place to remove the U.S. History portion of the accountability model, the Mississippi Historical Society exerted enough political pressure for it to retain a role within the accountability model. This official also stated a belief that the new system, as currently constructed, is a success, especially when considering, “Where we are versus where we started.”

Summary. Based on the evidence collected for this portion of the analysis, it is apparent the purpose of the instrument centered on one primary theme: *simplification*, and one secondary theme, *improvement*. In terms of the specific components being measured, the selection and implementation of each component is based on a variety of potential sources, with each component either originating from Federal regulations, Mississippi State Law, or the political pressure of special-interest groups.

Purpose of the Instrument. All the associated documentation contained references to the primary theme of *simplification*. Both the MPSAS 2016 and Senate Bill 2396 described the new accountability model as an attempt to simplify previous aspects of the system. Senate Bill 2396 twice references the transition to a “simple “A,” “B,” “C,” “D,” and “F” designation,” (SB 2396, 2013). Additionally, the interview with MDE Official #3 confirmed this sentiment, mentioning the misunderstanding surrounding the previous measure of Quality Distribution Index (QDI) and a desire for the legislature to “simplify” for the people of Mississippi. Several of the documents produced by MDE further echoed this reality, with the Mississippi School and District Grading System (2016) stating, “the goal is to help parents and the public better understand how well a

school is performing...” (p. 1) and the Important Facts about School and District Accountability (2016) listing that, “The grading system is designed to inform parents and communities how well their schools and districts are educating students,” (p. 1). Across the nation, states transitioning to an A-F report-card style system have typically cited simplicity on the part of parents and community members as one of the predominant factors involved with the decision, as noted by Howe and Murray (2015).

The secondary theme noted in Phase One of this study, was a desire for *improvement*. During the interview with MDE Official #2, on the topic of the original goals of the Accountability Task Force, the responses included, “Improving the system,” and ensuring the accountability system was, “Equitable and fair.” The goal of improvement was also demonstrated in the Mississippi Legislature’s educational goals:

- To mobilize resources and supplies to ensure that all students exit third grade reading on grade level by 2015
- To reduce the student dropout rate to 13% by 2015
- To have 60% of students scoring proficient and advanced on the assessments of the Common Core State Standards by 2016 with incremental increases of 3% each year thereafter (SB 2396, 2013).

By setting high expectations, and creating a system by which those expectations would incrementally increase, both over time and in the event of overall increases in student achievement statewide, it was clear improving low levels of student proficiency was at the forefront of the development of this model.

Origins of Components. In terms of the specific components being used to rate schools and districts in the MSAS, the interview with MDE Official #3 was particularly enlightening as, when questioned about the origins of the components, discussed the various aspects of the decision-making process. For one, the components used in the MSAS are partly based on Federal education regulations, specifically the requirement to measure the proficiency of math, reading, and science, while others, such as the growth for the Bottom-25% were implemented due to state law. Senate Bill 2396 specifically points out, “An emphasis on the progress of the lowest twenty-five percent of students in the school or district,” (SB 2396, 2013). Graduation rate, on the other hand, is required by both Federal regulation and Mississippi law; although according to MDE Official #3, those developing the accountability model had originally submitted a plan with a school or district’s graduation rate accounting for 100 points in the model, only to have the Federal government respond with a request to make the component play a larger role in the overall model. But of most interest is the reality that several components exist within the MSAS simply as a matter of political pressure, such as the U.S. History standardized test, which according to the MDE official was being discussed as a possibility to be removed from the model completely, was re-committed to on the part of the Mississippi Legislature as a result of political pressure from the Mississippi Historical Society. As another example, the College and Career Readiness component was implemented as a portion of a new movement on the part of the Mississippi Legislature to ensure all public school students were adequately prepared according to the new, Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards, adopted in 2015 (MDE MCCRS, 2015). In fact, the MPSAS 2016 document, when listing the components being measured, notes that the College and Career Readiness component, “Is

contingent upon legislative funding,” (MPSAS, 2016). So, in the event of political change or funding cuts, the CCR component, which is measured using a student’s ACT score, would be, in theory, removed from the model.

Phase Two

Quantitative Analysis. Phase Two of this study consisted of a quantitative aspect designed to further triangulate the evidence in response to the study’s central research question. More specifically, Phase Two was focused on addressing the second research sub-question:

Based on the 2016 MSAS results and the intended purpose, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?

For this purpose, two statistical measures were used to address this particular area of the study. First was a profile analysis, comparing the Top-15 versus the Bottom-15 districts across the 11 components of the accountability model. Next, a brief correlational analysis examined the relationship between a district’s accountability data, such as overall scale score or readiness, with demographic data, specifically the percentage of students affected by poverty in each district.

Profile Analysis. To begin this phase of the data collection, a profile analysis was conducted to determine if any statistical patterns emerged in the results of the two groups (Top-15, Bottom-15). The 11 components of the MSAS were input as the dependent variables, with group membership in the Top-15 (coded as “1”) or Bottom-15 (coded as “2”) being used as the independent variable. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 23 and the results are listed in the tables below. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 describe both the within-subject and between-subject factors being measured as a part of the analysis.

Table 3.1

Within-subject factors for Profile Analysis

Factor1	Dependent Variable
1	Reading Proficiency
2	Math Proficiency
3	History Proficiency
4	Science Proficiency
5	Reading Growth
6	Math Growth
7	Reading Low Growth
8	Math Low Growth
9	College and Career Readiness
10	Acceleration
11	Graduation Rate

Table 3.2

Between-subject factors for Profile Analysis

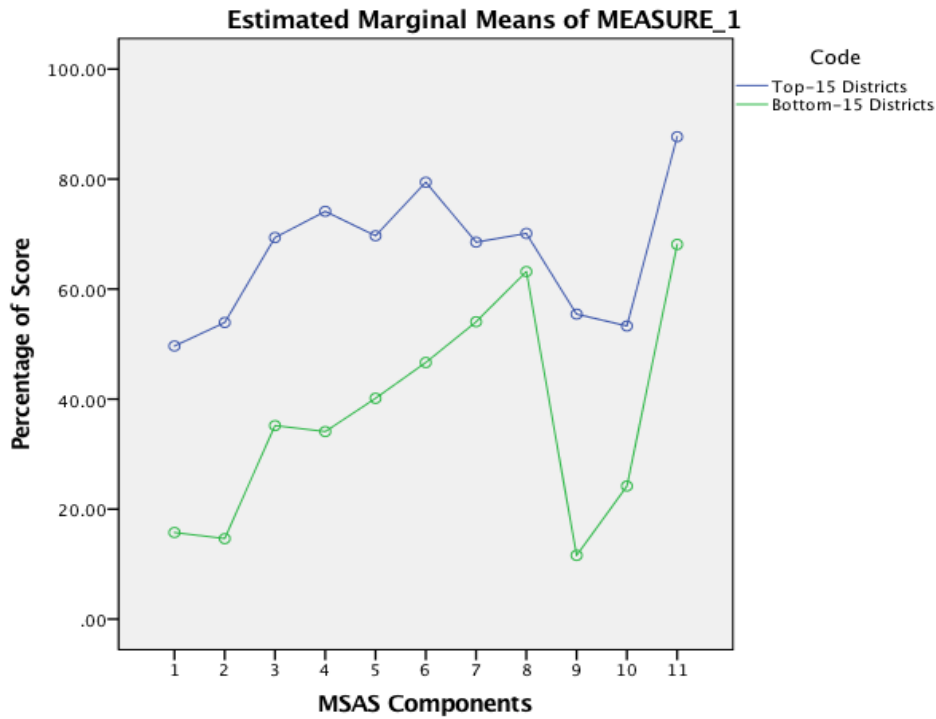
Code	N
1	15
2	15

Note. Code “1” represents the Top-15 districts, while Code “2” represents the Bottom-15 districts from the 2015-2016 MSAS results

Of particular value when conducting a profile analysis is the plot graph, demonstrating the differences between the results of each group. Figure 1 (below) contains the plot graph for this particular analysis, with the Dependent Variables, the 11 specific components of the MSAS, displayed on the x-axis, while the component score, which is measured as a percentage out of 100, is labeled on the y-axis.

Figure 1

Graphic Output of Profile Analysis



Next, Table 3.3 contains the descriptive statistics from the SPSS output, showing the Mean, Standard Deviation and N-count for all of the component scores for both groups. For the Top-15 districts, the components with the highest mean were: Graduation Rate (87.69), Math Growth (79.43), and Science Proficiency (74.13); while the components with the highest mean score for the Bottom-15 districts included Graduation Rate (68.12), Math Low Growth (63.18), and Reading Low Growth (54.06). On the other hand, the components with the lowest mean score for the Top-15 districts were Math Proficiency (53.92), Acceleration (53.29), and Reading Proficiency (49.65); whereas the components with the lowest mean scores for the school districts in the Bottom-15 included Reading Proficiency (15.75), Math Proficiency (14.64), and College and Career Readiness (11.59).

Table 3.3

Mean scores across components from Profile Analysis

Component	Top-15	Bottom-15	Difference
Reading Proficiency	49.65	15.75	33.90
Math Proficiency	53.92	14.64	39.28
U. S. History Proficiency	69.37	35.18	34.19
Science Proficiency	74.13	34.10	40.03
Reading Growth	69.69	40.15	29.54
Math Growth	79.43	46.65	32.78
Reading Low Growth	68.53	54.06	14.47
Math Low Growth	70.11	63.18	6.93
Readiness	55.45	11.59	43.86
Acceleration	53.29	24.19	29.10
Graduation Rate	87.69	68.12	19.57

The components with the greatest mean difference between the two groups were Readiness (difference of 43.86), Science Proficiency (40.03), and Math Proficiency (39.28) ; while the components with the lowest mean difference between the groups were Math Low Growth (6.93), Reading Low Growth (14.47), and Graduation Rate (19.57). It is also worth noting, for the Bottom-15 school districts, Jefferson County achieved a Graduation Rate component score of just 2.5%, which MDE Official #2 confirmed was inaccurate, but officials at the district ignored multiple requests to submit the correct numbers. If this data point is removed as an extreme outlier, the mean Graduation Rate for the Bottom-15 districts rises to 72.81, and the mean difference between Graduation Rates for the two groups drops to 14.88. It is also worth noting, the similarities between mean scores for each group when it comes to Reading Proficiency, Math Proficiency, and Readiness. In the Top-15 group, those mean scores for those components are 49.65, 53.92, and 53.29, respectively. Similarly, in the Bottom-15 group, the mean scores for those specific components are 15.75, 14.64, and 11.59, respectively.

Table 3.4

Tests of within-subjects effects for profile analysis

Measure: MEASURE_1						
	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
factor1	Spherecity Assumed	69309.249	10	6930.925	104.50 7	.000
	Greenhouse- Geisser	69309.249	3.880	17861.786	104.50 7	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	69309.249	4.743	14611.732	104.50 7	.000
	Lower-bound	69309.249	1.000	69309.249	104.50 7	.000
factor1 * Code	Spherecity Assumed	9738.000	10	973.800	14.683	.000
	Greenhouse- Geisser	9738.000	3.880	2509.594	14.683	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	9738.000	4.743	2052.959	14.683	.000
	Lower-bound	9738.000	1.000	9738.000	14.683	.001
Error(factor1)	Spherecity Assumed	18569.590	280	66.320		
	Greenhouse- Geisser	18569.590	108.649	170.914		
	Huynh-Feldt	18569.590	132.815	139.815		
	Lower-bound	18569.590	28.000	663.200		

Also, in terms of mean scores, the two smallest gaps in mean differences between the two groups (Math Low Growth – 6.93; Reading Low Growth – 14.47) vary a great deal from the differences between the other two growth components for each group (Reading growth – 29.54; Math Growth – 32.78). Finally, Tables 3.4 and 3.5 demonstrate the tests of within-subject effects, and within-subject contrasts. The results of the profile analysis are all significant at a $p < .05$ level, implying all of the within-subject factors play a role in determining a district’s success (and

subsequent rating as one of the Top-15 school districts in the state) or failure (and subsequent rating as one of the Bottom-15 school districts in the state).

Table 3.5

Tests of within-subjects contrasts for profile analysis

Source	factor1	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
factor1	Linear	13084.653	1	13084.653	187.366	.000
	Quadratic	5306.643	1	5306.643	41.545	.000
	Cubic	13020.383	1	13020.383	145.408	.000
	Order 4	19671.523	1	19671.523	284.059	.000
	Order 5	7947.466	1	7947.466	89.651	.000
	Order 6	3081.309	1	3081.309	54.926	.000
	Order 7	3016.080	1	3016.080	88.056	.000
	Order 8	841.949	1	841.949	21.861	.000
	Order 9	2128.007	1	2128.007	83.908	.000
	Order 10	1211.236	1	1211.236	18.937	.000
factor1 * Code	Linear	1848.608	1	1848.608	26.471	.000
	Quadratic	144.608	1	144.608	1.132	.296
	Cubic	266.783	1	266.783	2.979	.095
	Order 4	1411.793	1	1411.793	20.386	.000
	Order 5	1631.587	1	1631.587	18.405	.000
	Order 6	89.259	1	89.259	1.591	.218
	Order 7	1449.335	1	1449.335	42.314	.000
	Order 8	1498.112	1	1498.112	38.898	.000
	Order 9	1270.809	1	1270.809	50.108	.000
	Order 10	127.107	1	127.107	1.987	.170
Error(factor1)	Linear	1955.371	28	69.835		
	Quadratic	3576.476	28	127.731		
	Cubic	2507.223	28	89.544		
	Order 4	1939.040	28	69.251		
	Order 5	2482.174	28	88.649		
	Order 6	1570.775	28	56.099		
	Order 7	959.057	28	34.252		
	Order 8	1078.397	28	38.514		
	Order 9	710.115	28	25.361		
	Order 10	1790.961	28	63.963		

Correlational Analysis. Next, a Pearson correlation (r) was conducted between several of the MSAS components, looking to see if a statistically significant relationship existed. Of

interest in this particular correlation, was the relationship between Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency with the Readiness component as the Readiness component is essentially a proficiency measure, but instead of using the standardized English language arts or math assessments, the measurement is based upon the ACT score of high school juniors, specifically the percentage of students within a district's "Senior snapshot," who are "College and Career Ready," (or perhaps, proficient) in reading (cut score of 18 for English portion or 22 for Reading portion) and mathematics (cut score of 22 on Math portion). Therefore, this correlation was an attempt to determine if the two proficiency components for Reading and Math were essentially measuring the same skills and knowledge base as the Readiness component. For this analysis, the Reading Proficiency, Math Proficiency, and Readiness scores from both the Top-15 and Bottom-15 school districts were entered in an SPSS version 23 dataset and a basic bivariate correlation was conducted, the results of which are listed below. Per the results of the correlation analysis, the Readiness component has a correlation coefficient of .969 for Reading Proficiency and .919 for Math Proficiency, both of which are almost perfect positive correlations and are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ alpha level. In addition, Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency positively correlate with a coefficient of .967, which is also statistically significant at the $p < .05$ alpha level and, once again, is a near perfect correlation. Based on these results one could posit students, or from the perspective of a district-by-district comparison such as this particular study, districts with a higher percentage of students scoring proficient on the Readiness component (ACT) would have similar proficiencies in both Reading and Math Proficiency. The full results are listed below.

Table 3.6

Descriptive Statistics for Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Reading Proficiency	32.6967	17.53081	30
Math Proficiency	34.2800	20.81784	30
Readiness	33.5200	22.95049	30

Table 3.7

Correlations for Reading Prof., Math Prof., and Readiness for Correlation Analysis

		ReadProf	MathProf	Readiness
ReadProf	Pearson Correlation	1	.967**	.969**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	30	30	30
MathProf	Pearson Correlation	.967**	1	.919**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	30	30	30
Readiness	Pearson Correlation	.969**	.919**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	30	30	30

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary. Based on the statistical information from the profile analysis and correlational analysis, there is evidence of certain issues of construct validity within the MSAS. From the profile analysis results, it is worth noting some of the descriptive statistics that emerged, specifically several of the mean scores across varying components for both the Top-15 and Bottom-15 groups. For one, both groups had the two of the three lowest mean scores in the Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency components, implying one of the primary struggles for schools and districts across Mississippi is in regards basic proficiency in reading and math. It also stands out that in terms of the difference between mean scores for the Top-15 and Bottom-15 groups, the five components where the mean difference was greatest were, in order of largest

gap to smallest: Readiness, Science Proficiency, Math Proficiency, History Proficiency, and Reading Proficiency. Since the correlational analysis revealed almost perfect correlation coefficients between Readiness, Reading Proficiency, and Math Proficiency, it can be argued the primary difference between the overall scale scores, and subsequently the accountability grades between the Top-15 districts and the Bottom-15 districts is proficiency across all academic areas. This point is further supported by the reality that the Bottom-15 districts in the state have the highest mean score on the components of Reading Low Growth and Math Low Growth.

Similarly, Bottom-15 districts actually scored, on average, higher in the Reading Low Growth (54.06) and Math Low Growth (63.18) components than on the Reading Growth (40.15) and Math Growth (46.65) components, which was not the case for Top-15 districts, who on average scored higher in Reading Growth (69.69) and Math Growth (79.43) than in Reading Low Growth (68.53) and Math Low Growth (70.11). This would seem to imply Bottom-15 districts are better able to promote growth for their lowest quartile of students, who admittedly may have the advantage of significantly more room to grow, but are less adequate in terms of meeting growth across the total student population, which in light of certain demographic realities for low-performing districts, points to a major difference between the upper three quartiles of the student population between districts in the Top-15 and Bottom-15. So, by measuring academic growth for the lowest-performing students simply based on an across the board percentage, rather than on any other academic or socio-economic factors, it would appear the construct of the MSAS may be stacked against low-performing schools. The results of this portion of the analysis certainly point to potential issues of construct validity in the construction and implementation of the MSAS.

Phase Three

Sampling. Phase Three of this analysis consisted of the researcher interviewing community members from across the state of Mississippi to gauge their perceptions of the MSAS and any impact on local communities across the state. Purposeful sampling was used to identify six communities, three from the Top-15 districts per the 2015-2016 results, and three from the Bottom-15 districts.

Figure 2

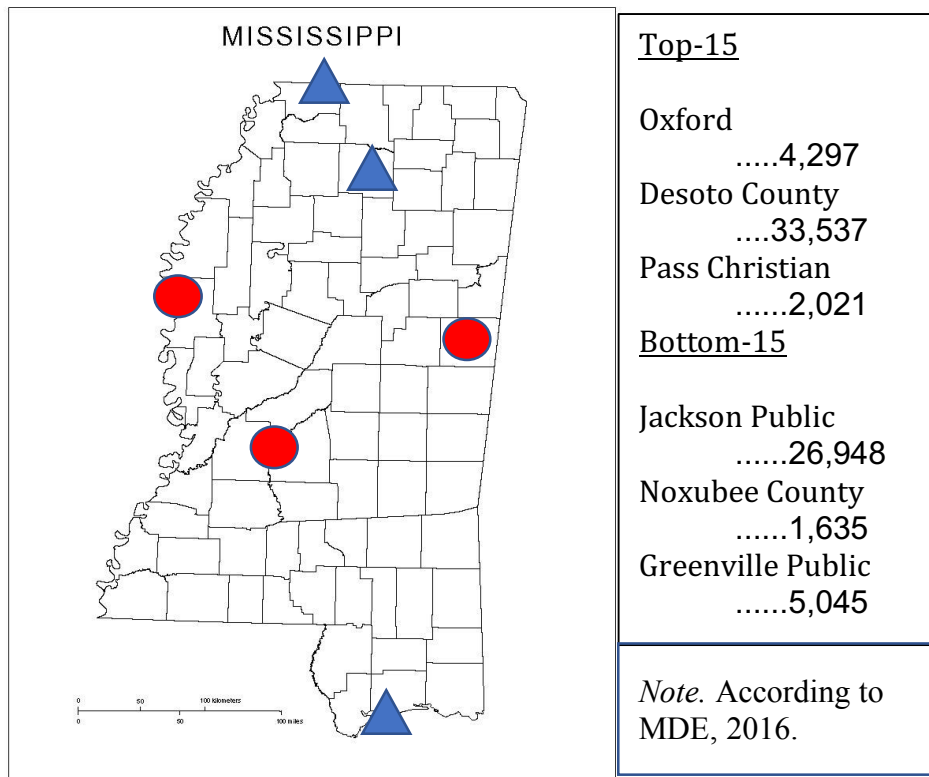


Figure 2. Map of selected school districts for Phase Three of analysis. The three blue triangles represent the communities with a Top-15 school district and the three red dots represent communities with a Bottom-15 school district.

The three top-Top-15 districts selected were Oxford School District, Desoto County School District, and Pass Christian School District. The three districts from the Bottom-15 of the 2015-

2016 rankings were Jackson Public School District, Noxubee County School District, and Greenville Public School District. The locations vary in geographic location as well as student population and were selected to demonstrate the diverse range of school districts in Mississippi. For instance, Desoto County and Jackson Public are the two largest districts in the state by student population with over 33,000 and 26,000 students, respectively, so these districts represent major population centers in the state, while also having school districts ranked on opposite ends of the accountability system. Figure 2 is a map identifying the three Top-15 districts and the three Bottom-15 districts, including their student population.

Interviewee Selection. For each school district, the researcher drove to the community and began seeking interview participants using purposeful, random sampling, typically beginning with the local courthouse or city hall building. From there, the researcher took recommendations or, if none were provided, moved on to another local establishment, be it local business or bank, seeking additional participants. During the course of this data collection, the researcher interviewed mayors, city clerks, pastors, librarians, bankers, realtors, parents, tourism directors, economic development officials, small business owners, non-profit workers, city planners, hospital and medical clinic staffers, and education policy associates. Upon initial contact, any potential subjects were given a brief overview of the research study and the purpose and scope of the interview, at which point, if they agreed to participate, they were read the prepared statement and their interview was recorded for accuracy purposes. Each participant was also reminded of their ability to withdraw from participation in the study at any point in the process if they so choose.

Questioning. Once all of the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed, aggregated, and coded for themes and patterns. While several of the questions asked of each interviewee were straightforward “yes” or “no” questions, others were open-response questions and required additional analysis in order to allow the participants’ answers to fit into the frame of the study. The questions asked fit into two primary themes, one being whether or not the participants had any basic understanding and knowledge of the accountability system and the grades derived from said system. The questions associated with this theme were as follows:

- Q1 – What, if any knowledge do you have of the MSAS?
- Q2 – What does your district’s grade tell you about the school system?
- Q3 – Do you believe the district’s grade accurately reflects the quality of the schools?

In addition, each of the primary questions had follow-up sub-questions in the hopes of adding to the depth of the original questions. Those sub-questions were:

- Q1A – Do you know any of the specific components being scored?
- Q2A – What does the district’s grade tell you about the teachers in the district?
- Q2B – What does the district’s grade tell you about the students in the district?
- Q3A – On what do base your response to Q3?
- Q3B – Do you have any specific thoughts on how a district should be rated?

The second theme was centered on what, if any, impact the results of the system may have had on the local community, from the perspective of the participant. To get at this theme, the following questions were asked of each participant:

- Q4 – Does the district’s grade have an impact on the local community?
- Q5 – Are there non-academic factors that impact a district’s performance?

As with the first theme, there were a series of follow-up sub-questions to add more information to the initial questions, which were:

- Q4A – Do you believe a low school rating would have a negative impact on a community?
- Q4B – If a school has a low rating, who is most responsible for correcting the issue?
- Q5A – What are those factors?
- Q5B – Should these factors play a role in a district’s rating?

Coding. For each question asked of the participants, the coded data was then divided into two groups, representing participants from the Top-15 districts and the Bottom-15 districts. On the Question 1 and Question 1A, (what knowledge do you have of the MSAS or the specific components being scored) participant answers were coded to either represent “None,” “Little,” “Moderate,” or “Mastery.” As a note, participants who answered that their only knowledge of the system was through the reporting of the school/district’s overall letter grade in the local media each year, were classified as “Little,” whereas those whose answers were scored as “Moderate,” felt comfortable enough with their knowledge of the system “to hold people accountable,” or “to list some but not all of the different components.”

For Question 2, participant answers were coded into one of five responses, “Positive-specific,” “Positive-general,” “Unsure,” “Negative-general,” or “Negative-specific.” Answers coded as either “Positive-general,” or “Negative-general,” included generalized responses ranging from, “The school must be well-run,” “Seems like a good place,” to “They are not doing what they are supposed to do,” or “Need improvement.” On the other hand, responses coded as either “Positive-specific,” or “Negative-specific,” included an answer with a unique reason for

the participant's positive or negative view of the district. For example, several of the "Positive-specific," responses included "It correlates with the strength of the community," and "Teachers are clearly being attentive to students' needs." Some of the "Negative-specific," comments included, "The leadership and system are ever-changing," "The children (students) are not trying," and "It is a vicious cycle where no one wants to come here." Similarly, the responses to sub-questions Q2A and Q2B, which ask the participants to describe what the overall district grade tells them about the teachers and students of the district, were coded to reflect either generalized or specific answers. In regards to Q2A (teachers), responses were scored as either "Unsure/nothing," "Positive-credit to teachers," "Negative-teachers at fault," or "Negative-teachers not at fault." Answers for "Positive-credit to teachers," included statements such as, "I would assume we have quality teachers," "I would say they must be in the 90th percentile of teachers in the state," "They're doing a great job," "They're dedicated and hard-working." On the negative side, responses ranged from blaming the school district's teachers with quotes such as, "Some teachers don't seem to care about students," and "I would have to question the quality of the teachers and their preparation," to citing other factors as the reason for the low rating with statements such as, "There is a lack of leadership," "The teachers are overwhelmed," or "They can't teach disruptive students." The coding of responses to Q2B was similar in that participants' answers were grouped as either, "Positive-credit to students," "Positive-credit other factors," "Unsure/no answer," "Negative-credit other factors," or "Negative-fault of students." So, on the positive side, participant answers ranged from "Some students may be smarter," "Some students are excellent," "The students are working hard," to "Students are more successful with the tools and opportunities they have," "It is a more affluent community, so they

are better prepared and supported,” or “They can’t succeed without quality teachers.” In terms of the negative responses, participant statements either credited other factors, for example, “Students are not getting opportunities,” or “It is hard to blame kids,” or directly blamed the students for the lack of success, with comments such as, “There is no control the students are disruptive,” or “Students are not in tune with what is being taught.”

Question 3 then asked if the interviewees believed the district’s grade was an accurate reflection of school quality, so Q3A served as a follow-up aimed at finding out where those perceptions came from. Based on the answers given by the participants, the results were coded as either “Personal/interpersonal experiences,” “Perceived quality-negative,” “Perceived quality-positive,” or “No answer/unsure/no. For example, some participants mentioned their beliefs about the grade reflecting the quality of the schools came from, “Experience as a parent,” “Friends who are teachers,” or “My experience working with the schools.” Others reacted based on their own perception of the quality of the schools, whether positive – “Just a general perception I have,” – or negative – “Hard to grade based on Standardized tests,” or “Those numbers could be inflated.”

Questions 4 and 5 focused on the impact accountability grades could have on the local community. Q4A asked participants to make a judgement on if they believed a low rating for a school district would have a negative impact on the local community. The responses for Q4A were coded as “No,” “Yes-general,” “Yes-people would leave,” “Yes-negative impact on community,” or “No answer.” As an example, the responses coded as “Yes-general,” were simple affirmations such as, “I think so,” or “Definitely.” Other participants were more specific in their affirmation with statements such as, “People would move,” “No businesses would come

here,” or “The people who can, will leave.” Other participants commented on the potential negative impact on the community, saying things ranging from, “It could lead to high-unemployment and crime,” “It will lead to a drop in population and tax revenue,” or “The community will suffer.” Question 4B sought to take the line of questioning one step further, asking participants to state who they felt would be most responsible in a situation where a district was poorly rated. The responses were coded as either, “Leadership,” “Teachers,” “Students,” “Parents,” “Community,” or “Government.”

The final sub-questions, Q5A and Q5B, were follow-ups to Question Five, which asked the participants if, in their opinion, there existed non-academic factors which could impact the performance of a school or district within the accountability system. Q5A asked them to name any of these potential factors, and responses were coded as either, “Economics,” “Home-life,” “Extra-curricular,” or “Social.” Q5B then asked participants whether or not those factors should play a role in a district’s rating, with the responses being coded as either, “Yes,” “Yes but unsure of how to do it,” “No,” or “Consider, but not overused in rating.”

Results. At the conclusion of the interviews, the responses were grouped into tables showing the total responses for each question, as well as the responses for the Top-15 locations and Bottom-15 locations, separately. For Question One, the majority of respondents (23/26) described their knowledge of the accountability system as either, “None,” or “Little,” with the participants from the Top-15 districts more likely to respond with the latter (9 out of 12) as opposed to participants from the Bottom-15 districts who were only slightly more likely to answer “Little,” than “None” (5 out of 11). The answers to Q1A were similar with 24 out of the

26 respondents stating they had little to no knowledge of the specific components being scored by the accountability system. The full results for Question One is listed in below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Stakeholder Response to Question One

Question	Response	Total	Top-15	Bottom-15
Q1: What knowledge do you have of the MSAS?	None	8	3	5
	Little	15	9	6
	Moderate	3	1	2
	Mastery	0	0	0
Q1A: Do you know any of the specific components being scored?	None	19	10	9
	Little	5	3	2
	Moderate	2	0	2
	Mastery	0	0	0

For Question Two, the results were split between the two groups, as participants from the Top-15 were overwhelmingly positive, with most of those choosing to give a generalized positive statement about the district based on the rating. On the other hand, those from the Bottom-15 were more diverse in their responses, with two being unsure, five giving a generalized negative comment, and six giving a specific negative comment as a reaction to the district’s grade. When asked specifically about their thoughts on the teachers of their district as a result of the accountability grade (Q2A), those from Top-15 districts were most likely to respond positively and give credit to the teachers, whereas the responses were evenly split between “Unsure,” “Negative-teachers at fault,” and “Negative-teachers not at fault.” For Q2B, participants from both the Top-15 and Bottom-15 districts were evenly split in terms of giving credit for the success/failures to the students or other factors. The full results from Question Two are listed below in Table 4.2

Table 4.2

Stakeholder Response to Question Two

Question	Response	Total	Top-15	Bottom-15
Q2: What does the grade tell you about the school system?	Positive – specific	3	3	0
	Positive – general	9	9	0
	Unsure	2	0	2
	Negative – general	5	0	5
	Negative – specific	7	1	6
Q2A: What does the grade tell you about teachers in the district?	Unsure/nothing	6	2	4
	Positive – Credit to teachers	8	8	0
	Negative – Teachers at fault	4	0	4
	Negative – Teachers not at fault	5	0	5
Q2B: What does the grade tell you about students in the district?	Positive – Credit to students	4	4	0
	Positive – Credit other factors	4	4	0
	Unsure/no answer	2	2	0
	Negative – Credit other factors	5	0	5
	Negative – Students at fault	5	0	5

In response to Question Three, participants from both groups overwhelmingly responded they believed the grade for their respective district was an accurate reflection of the quality of schools in the district (21 out of 26), with most of these (10 out of 24) basing their beliefs on either their own personal interactions with the district or on the experiences of their friends and family members. In terms of their thoughts on how a school or district should be graded, the majority of respondents (18 out of 26), either not responding directly or stating they were unsure. The complete results for Question 3 are listed below in Table 4.3

Table 4.3

Stakeholder Response to Question Three

Question	Response	Total	Top-15	Bottom-15
Q3: Do you believe the district's grade accurately reflects the quality of the schools?	Yes	21	11	10
	No	2	1	1
	Unsure	3	1	2
Q3A: What is this perception based on?	Personal/interpersonal experiences	10	6	4
	Perceived quality – negative	8	2	6
	Perceived quality – positive	2	1	1
	No answer/unsure/no	4	3	1
Q3B: Do you have any thoughts on how a school should be scored?	Yes	5	1	4
	No	3	2	1
	Unsure	8	4	4
	No answer	10	6	4

Question Four, which began to focus on the community aspect of the accountability system, began with every participant unanimously responding they believed a district's grade would have an impact on the community. When asked the follow-up Q4A, most of the participants responded they believed a low rating would have a negative impact on the community, with four responding with a generalized yes, versus five stating the negative impact would lead to people leaving the community for other opportunities, and another nine believing the negative impact would be felt by the community.

Table 4.4

Stakeholder Response to Question Four

Question	Response	Total	Top-15	Bottom-15
Q4: Does a district’s grade have an impact on the community?	Yes	26	13	13
	No	0	0	0
Q4A: Do you believe a low rating would have a negative impact on a community?	No	0	0	0
	Yes – general	4	3	1
	Yes – People would leave community	5	3	2
	Yes – Negative impact on community	9	5	4
	No Answer	8	2	6
Q4B: If a school district has a low rating, who is responsible for correcting the issues?	Leadership	19	12	7
	Teachers	2	0	2
	Students	0	0	0
	Parents	3	1	2
	Community	2	0	2
	Government	1	0	1

From there, in response to Q4B, the participants predominantly felt the leadership of the district, be it at the district or building level, were to be held most responsible in the event of a low rating (19 out of 26); although, participants from the Bottom-15 districts were much more varied in their responses, with two answering “Teachers,” two answering “Parents,” two answering “Community,” and one responding “Government.” The complete results of Question Four are listed in Table 4.4.

Question Five, began with a similar pattern to Question Four, with each participant stating they believed there were non-academic factors influencing a district’s accountability performance, but the answers on what those factors included were split. For Q5A, 18 of the 26 participants stated either “Economics,” or “Home-life,” as an impact on school performance, but

12 of those 18, (five out of seven, “Economics,” seven out of 11, “Home-life”) were interviewees from the Bottom-15 districts. On the other hand, seven out of 13 respondents from the Top-15 districts cited either “Extra-curricular,” or “Social,” factors as having an influence on academic performance.

Table 4.5

<i>Stakeholder Response to Question Five</i>				
Question	Response	Total	Top-15	Bottom-15
Q5: Are there non-academic factors affecting a district’s performance?	Yes	26	13	13
	No	0	0	0
Q5A: What are those factors?	Economics	7	2	5
	Home-life	11	4	7
	Extra-curricular	5	5	0
	Social	3	2	1
Q5B: Should these factors play a role in the district’s rating?	Yes	6	4	2
	Yes but unsure how	10	5	5
	No	5	2	3
	Consider but do not overuse	5	2	3

When pressed as to whether or not these factors should play a role in a district’s rating (Q5B), the majority (16 out of 26) responded that they should be taken into account, although six of those 16 were unsure as to how exactly to make that a reality. While five total participants responded, “No,” another five responded with a belief that these non-academic factors should be considered, but should not necessarily play a large role in the accountability rating. The complete results from Question Five are listed in Table 4.5.

Summary. After interviewing 26 individuals from six communities across Mississippi, the coded responses to the Phase Three questioning pointed to two primary themes, *knowledge of the accountability system* and the *impact of the accountability grade on local communities*.

Knowledge of the Accountability System. As noted in Phase One, one of the primary goals of the MSAS, according to available documentation and interviews with individuals involved in the development process, was to create a simplified system, which would allow parents and other stakeholders concerned with the public school system to have easy-to-understand information about the successes and/or failures of their local public schools. Based on the data collected, this goal may come up well short of the intended outcome. Concerning Question One, the vast majority of respondents (23 out of 26) stated they knew little to nothing about the accountability system, but a greater percentage (nine out of 12) of participants from Top-15 districts stated their knowledge was limited to annual news media reporting the letter grade for local schools and the district, as opposed to those from Bottom-15 districts (six out of 11). On the other hand, in regards to the specific components being scored (Q1A), the majority of participants (19 out of 26) responded they had no knowledge of the measured components, regardless of if they were from the Top-15 districts (10) or the Bottom-15 districts (nine). This implies that while the accountability model may have been “simplified,” it is apparent many members of local communities have very limited knowledge of the system and the manner in which their schools and districts are rated.

For Question Two, which asked participants to state their perceptions of the district, teachers, and students of their district based on the accountability grade, all respondents from the Top-15 districts gave positive implications based on the letter grade, although most of them,

(nine out of 12) were general or vague in their response; whereas there was a greater diversity of responses from participants from the Bottom-15 districts. Two respondents were unsure what the grade told them about the district, five more responded with general negative feelings, (ex. “Not doing as good as needed,”) while six stated specific negative reactions to their school district’s letter grade. When specifically asked about teachers, respondents from the Top-15 districts were mostly (eight out of 10) quick to credit teachers for the academic performance of the district, as opposed to those from the Bottom-15 districts, who were split on their negative thoughts about the district’s teachers, between the grade being the teachers fault (four out of 13) and the teachers not being at fault (five out of 13), while four others were unsure if the grade made any comment about the teachers in the district. When it came to a district’s students, both groups were split on whether or not the students were to be credited for successes/failures (4/10 for Top-15, five out of 10 for Bottom-15) or other factors (four out of 10 for Top-15, five out of 10 for Bottom-15).

The responses to Question Three highlight the belief of the majority of participants (21 out of 26) that the letter grade their particular district received was an accurate reflection of the quality of the school or district, with many of those basing their decisions on their personal or interpersonal experiences with the local district (10 out of 24) or their own general perception, be it positive or negative (10 out of 24). Interestingly, when participants were asked if they had specific thoughts on how a school or district should be scored or graded, most who answered from the Top-15 districts stated either, “No,” (four out of seven) or, “Unsure,” (two out of seven); however, of those from Bottom-15 districts, four responded, “Yes,” versus one who, “Unsure,” and four who stated, “No.”

Based on these results, it would seem when considering the first primary theme of Phase Three, *knowledge of the accountability system*, the majority of participants in this particular study were quite unsure of how their schools and districts were scored and had varying opinions about what those letter grades implied about the schools, teachers, and students. At the same time, the majority of them held the belief the letter grade was an accurate representation of the quality (or lack thereof) of the school district. In the course of conducting the interviews, many of the respondents seemed to feel a sense of disappointment with themselves for not having a better understanding of the rating system; yet for one reason or another, they seem to trust the accountability model and those in charge of its development to report the academic achievement of the students and schools within their districts.

Impact of the Accountability Grade on Local Communities. Shifting to the second major theme of Phase Three of this analysis, two of the researcher's questions were answered unanimously in the course of the interview process; Question Four: "Does the district grade impact the local community?" and Question Five: "Are there non-academic factors affecting a district's performance?" each of which were answered in the affirmative by every participant in the study. This points to people across Mississippi overwhelmingly believing the success and/or failure of local public schools and districts has a real impact on the local community, while admitting there are factors beyond the schools' realm of control that may greatly influence the school or district's performance. When asked more specifically about the impact on local communities, especially in the case of a low performance rating having a negative impact on said communities, all participants answered in the affirmative, although four (three from Top-15) responded with a general, "Yes," five (three from Top-15, two from Bottom-15) specifically

pointed out that people would leave a community where a district received a low performance rating, and nine (five from Top-15 and four from Bottom-15) describing how the low rating would negatively impact the community.

It is also important to note, as this study is being conducted within the field of educational leadership, 19 of the 26 participants identified the leadership, whether at the building or district level, as those who would be primarily responsible for correcting a low performance rating. Of most interest from this line of questioning, though, is the variance between responses from participants in each group. Of those interviewed from Top-15 districts, 12 out of 13 pointed to leadership as the party responsible for guiding improvement; however, participants from the Bottom-15 districts gave much more varied responses. While seven out of 13 did place the responsibility on the shoulders of leadership, two mentioned teachers, two mentioned parents, two mentioned the local community, and one singled out government. While all those interviewed may believe a school district's grade impacts the local community, it would seem those from high-performing districts view the school district as a separate entity, whose leadership is solely responsible for correcting any issues they may face, whereas in communities with low-performing school districts, stakeholders appeared more aware of other factors and complexities involved in academic performance. This divide is further highlighted when analyzing the data from Question 5A, which asked participants to identify the outside factors they felt might impact a school district's academic performance. Respondents from Top-15 districts were the only ones (five out of 26) to mention extra-curricular-related issues, such as the athletic or artistic programs being offered, as well as representing two out of the three participants who mentioned social factors. On the opposite side of the spectrum, those

interviewed from Bottom-15 districts focused on economic factors (five out of 13) and issues stemming from a child's home-life (seven out of 13). Based on this data, it would seem stakeholders within high-performing communities may have the luxury of focusing on the existence and quality of extra-curricular programming, while those from struggling school districts have socio-economic issues stemming from poverty.

Chapter Summary

All of these results were compiled in reaction to the central research question and the subsequent research sub-questions at the core of this case study and were documented, coded, and analyzed. The data collected for Phase One points toward themes of *simplification* and *improvement* as the primary purpose behind the development and implementation of the new accountability model. Additionally, the 11 components being measured in the MSAS come from a combination of Federal regulations, Mississippi state law, and political pressures from particular special-interest groups or current political trends in the state of Mississippi.

For Phase Two, the results of the quantitative analysis point towards several issues of construct validity, primarily in relation to the high degree of correlation between Readiness and the Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency components, suggesting a student's ACT score may be simply another reflection of that student's Reading and Math Proficiency, which is already being measured. Additionally, by creating separate components to measure the growth of the lowest-performing quartile of students in both reading and math, low-performing districts with a high population of economically disadvantaged may be penalized for their upper three quartiles of the student population not having the same level of variation from the bottom quartile as districts at the top of the MSAS results.

For Phase Three, data collected from interviews with community members across the state centered on two key themes, *knowledge of the accountability system* and *impact of the accountability grade on the local community*. Overall, the majority of those who participated in the interviews had little to no knowledge of the methods behind the accountability system, though all participants perceived a school district's accountability grade to impact the local community, especially in low-performing districts.

The next chapter will address the analysis of said results and the relationship between the results of this particular study and existing literature on the topic of school accountability systems and validity. Next will be a discussion of the implications of the study in terms of the MSAS as a matter of policy, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This research project was a case study analysis of the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System, attempting to address the central research question:

Is the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System an effective policy tool to accomplish the stated goals of (1) promoting public understanding of school performance and (2) improving performance of schools and districts?

Over the course of this study, data was collected in three segments to triangulate the available information and provide an answer to the above research question. Phase One looked specifically at the development of the MSAS, including a document analysis of all documentation associated with the creation and implementation of the system, as well as interviews with several individuals with direct knowledge of the development process. Phase Two was a statistical analysis of the 2015-2016 results, looking for potential issues of construct validity. Phase Three consisted of one-on-one interviews with community members from six districts across the state, three from the Top-15 and three from the Bottom-15, based on the 2015-2016 results.

Discussion of Results.

Phase One. Phase One of this study was aimed at answering the first research sub-question:

Based on archived records and interviews with participants during the development of the MSAS, what was the intended purpose of the instrument and the specific purpose and intent of each of the eleven components of the system?

At the conclusion of this portion of the analysis, it is apparent the answer to the aforementioned question is divided into two main themes, the first of which is *simplification*. The documentation and the interview responses repeatedly highlighted the need to remove the previous, overly-complicated accountability model, and replace it with a simple, more-straightforward model combining both Federal and state regulations, to the benefit of parents and other stakeholders. On a secondary level, the goals of the model and the selection of measurement components appear to represent a theme of *improvement*, as legislators, MDE officials, and educators of Mississippi seem intent on creating a system that will drive academic improvement and progress for the state's students. Setting high expectations, and creating a tiered scale to gradually increase those expectations over time, point to this theme.

At the same time, there is reason for concern as the varying, and sometimes trivial, nature by which the measurement components are decided upon and implemented suggest more of a concession to certain political pressures as opposed to a direct approach to advancing student learning and growth. This could potentially lead to instability of the MSAS and all of the data and analysis being conducted as well. If, for instance, there is a shift in the Mississippi Legislature away from the ACT as an effective measure of judging students' "College and

Career Readiness,” or a simple loss of the desire to continue funding a statewide session of the ACT for all public school juniors, the “Readiness,” component would be removed, changing the scoring of the MSAS, while also removing the possibility of straightforward, year-to-year data comparisons discussed by officials at MDE.

On a similar note, the reality of the U.S. History state test, which is the sole basis for a Mississippi school district’s “History Proficiency,” component, continuing to be a part of the accountability model simply due to political pressure from special-interest groups, specifically the Mississippi Historical Society, goes contrary to the theme of *simplification*. The notion that a subject area is only valued if it is assessed with a standardized test is deeply flawed, not to mention 5% of each district’s accountability grade is influenced by one class of students’ performance on the state test. In smaller districts, such as the one where the researcher previously served as an administrator, student population creates a situation where U.S. History is based on the performance from one teacher’s classroom, yet it has an impact on the rating of the entire district. If the goals of the MSAS were to simplify the model and focus on student improvement, it would stand to reason that decisions about what components are used to measure achievement are based on more than arbitrary political pressures.

Phase Two. Phase Two consisted of a quantitative analysis of the 2015-2016 MSAS results in order to answer the second research sub-question:

Based on the results of the 2015-2016 MSAS, what issues of construct validity are revealed in the data?

After analyzing the 2015-2016 MSAS results, it is worth pointing out several potential instances in which the validity of the MSAS results could be called into question. For one, the mean

scores for the Top-15 and Bottom-15 districts across the 11 components highlight several patterns. It would stand to reason the lowest rated districts in the state would have the potential for high scores in the growth measures for the lowest quartile of their student population; although, the fact those low-growth scores outpace growth measures for the entire students population, and each of the proficiency measures score considerably low on average, implies there is less variation in the Bottom-15 districts between their lowest quartile of students and the upper three quartiles, especially in comparison to the Top-15 districts. Though the Bottom-15 districts average Math Low Growth score (63.18) was the highest among all of the component scores, the overall mean Math Growth score for Bottom-15 districts was a paltry 14.64. So, while 63% on average of the lowest-performing students in these districts demonstrated growth from one academic year to the next, on average over 85% of the total student population in these districts is not on grade level in mathematics.

On another note, the high degree of positive correlation between the Readiness component and the components for Reading Proficiency and Math Proficiency would appear to give districts with higher overall proficiency scores more of an advantage, as the Readiness factor (ACT score) is essentially just another measurement of proficiency in math and reading. In the Top-15 districts, where proficiency numbers are much higher across the board, adding Readiness gives these districts the opportunity to score well in an additional component, worth 50 points and 5% of the total scale score. While these numbers may not demonstrate an outright invalid accountability model, these issues are worth noting and should be the focus of additional research going forward to ensure the model is accurately assessing school and district academic performance.

Phase Three. Phase Three concluded the study by using interview data collected from community members across Mississippi to answer the third and final research sub-question:

Based on data from interviews with stakeholders, what is the perceived impact on local communities stemming from the 2015-2016 results?

Based on the data from these interviews, it is clear one of the stated goals for the MSAS, which is to provide quality information to stakeholders across the state, is not being met. While the sample size of people who were interviewed is small by comparison to the population of the state, the fact that the majority of those who participated knew little to nothing about the system added to the anecdotal experiences of interactions with MDE officials and the researcher's own experiences, likely make it a safe assumption that the majority of people know very little beyond the letter grades reported annually in their local media outlets.

The responses of interview participants also demonstrated a clear belief on the part of citizens that the accountability ratings assigned to schools in accordance with the MSAS have a significant impact on the local communities served by these school districts. Since most people know little about the system itself, the data shows clear evidence of a disparity between community members served by high-performing districts and those in communities with struggling school districts. Based on the results, one could posit people in top-rated districts have certain assumptions about the quality of the schools, teachers, and students within their communities. Most of the discussion with these individuals centered on general reactions to having an "A," rating, including assumptions the school was performing as expected, including standout work by teachers and better academic and social settings for students. This assumption extends to the belief that a school and/or district's leaders are expected to make corrections in the

event of worsening performance. Alternately, conversations in low-performing communities created a varying list of what factors or individuals could be responsible for the poor ratings. Again, all of these discussions and assumptions are based almost solely on one, simple letter grade, which often guide the informal, anecdotal conversations taking place within a community about the quality, or lack thereof, of the local school district.

Of most value to this discussion of community perception, is the overwhelming belief a low accountability grade can have serious, negative implications for a community. Poorly-rated districts often exist in communities with little economic growth and/or opportunity, and, in most of these scenarios, the parents with the financial ability to do so, either send their children to nearby private schools or pick up their families and move to another area. As a result, the local public schools often have a student population severely lacking in ethnic and/or financial diversity. Moving forward, a low accountability rating almost becomes somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy, as, according to the interview data, businesses and other economic opportunities are unwilling to enter these communities, as a low-rated public school could be perceived on their part as an indicator of the local workforce, while also having significant ramifications for any employees who would be asked to relocate to one of these communities. In the case of most of the Bottom-15 districts, there is no apparent direct path to school improvement from the perspective of community members, who often seemed frustrated or defeated when discussing the local schools. It would seem impossible to improve the local school system without significant improvements to the local economic and social realities; however, these seem unlikely to drastically improve without a host of factors, one of which likely includes at least the perception of a quality local school system. This reality further

highlights the issue with MDE's second primary goal, "Guiding school improvement," as changing the public school accountability system in itself is not likely to change the perception around low-performing schools and districts.

Relationship to Existing Research

Validity of Accountability Systems. As discussed in Chapter II, there is a growing existence of literature on the subject of public school accountability systems, primarily stemming from the *A Nation at Risk* report (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). For Mississippi specifically, one major concern is the recent frequency of major changes to the statewide accountability system and standardized testing program, which make it difficult for schools and educators to get a true grasp of what is being measured and respond appropriately, as described by Royals (2015). In the process of this study, multiple officials within the Mississippi Department of Education claim there is a true desire to commit to the MSAS for multiple years in order to have actual, "Apples to apples," comparisons for student and school achievement data. If the Mississippi Legislature and MDE would cooperate to ensure at least some degree of consistency, in the very least it would provide educators, policymakers, and researchers with comparable information to conduct further analyses of achievement and improvement. There remains, however, issues of validity within the MSAS, as the results of the rating are primarily based on standardized test scores, with nine of the 11 components derived from student test results. Haertels and Herman (2005) discussed the problems with an over-reliance on testing, as it fails to measure other areas of a student's learning, a sentiment which was echoed by many of the participants who were interviewed for this study. While many of the respondents were

unfamiliar with the MSAS and the specific components being scored, many of them assumed it was primarily reliant upon standardized test scores.

Impact of Poverty. Based on the literature, there is little doubt poverty plays a large role in the performance of individual students and subsequently their schools and districts when it comes to measures of accountability. Research at the national level, points to the likelihood that students from high-poverty backgrounds are more likely to fail academically (USDoE, 2013), that income disparity has an impact on both schools *and* local communities (Berliner, 2012), and that public schools are now being unfairly asked to deal with the biggest problems in our society (Stitzlein, 2015). Since Mississippi is a state overwhelmingly impacted by poverty (NCES, 2016) and multiple studies, such as those by Leonard and Box (2009) and Johnson (2005), demonstrate how poor school accreditation rankings and student achievement are related to high populations of low-SES students and the resources available in schools and districts, respectively, this is an issue worth analyzing within the context of this study.

The poverty issue in relation to the MSAS is most noticeable within Phases Two and Three of the case study. In terms of Phase Two, when divided into groups of the Top-15 districts and Bottom-15 districts, the two groups average 25% and 95% students of poverty, respectively, which does not seem to a simple coincidence. During the Phase Three interviews, respondents from both groups discussed how the issues associated with poverty, such as students coming to school hungry or improperly clothed, may impact student and school performance. Additionally, two of the three Bottom-15 districts selected for this study (Greenville Public and Noxubee County) were located in sparsely populated, rural areas, and those participating from those communities described the difficulties facing students and families in these areas, which are

severely lacking in economic opportunities and social support structures. Many of the participants in low-performing communities discussed the inability to hire and retain quality teachers as a major issue, echoing research such as that of Johnston (2009) and Hargreaves, Parsley, and Cox (2015). When students are not having their social and emotional needs met at home, educators are lacking the basic resources to appropriately modify their instruction to meet the academic needs of their students, and communities are losing the social and economic opportunities that tie people and their families to a particular area, it would seem impossible for a school and/or district to meet the achievement requirements necessary to succeed under the guidelines of the MSAS.

Policy Recommendations

From a policy standpoint, the following are suggestions which may be considered by legislators, MDE officials, and educators to address and potentially improve the MSAS to more adequately and efficiently provide for the academic needs of Mississippi's public school students:

1. Commit to maintaining a consistent accountability model for a period of at least five years to allow schools, districts, educators, students, and parents the opportunity to become familiar with the expectations and implications for the new system.
2. Consider withholding the accountability grades as schools and districts adjust to the details and intricacies of the new model, so as not to place additional negative pressure on low-performing districts as they strive to improve.
3. If changes are made, they should be in the form of further simplifying the model by eliminating non-required components such as History Proficiency or components

repetitively measuring similar academic performance such as College and Career Readiness.

4. Include a school or district's demographic data, specifically as it relates to socio-economic status and poverty, into the reporting of results and assessment of achievement.
5. Develop and implement a massive informational campaign to promote and explain the new accountability model, how it is measured, and the implications for local schools and communities.

These recommendations may not be all-inclusive or exclusive, but hopefully provide a starting point for efforts to further analyze and improve the MSAS to the benefit of Mississippi and public education as a whole.

Implications for Further Research

While this research is extensive and thorough, it is certainly not a final conclusion in the discussion of the MSAS and/or accountability and assessment as a whole in the realm of public education. To further analyze the issues and topics discussed in this study, there would be great value in conducting a similar analysis to other state accountability models across the United States, seeking out similarities, differences, and potential best-practices in the effective assessment of public schools. Furthermore, in terms of the MSAS, specifically, additional quantitative analysis of the, including either further correlation and regression analyses amongst the various components, and/or analysis of the MSAS results outside of the two groups (Top-15 and Bottom-15) at focus in this study could prove beneficial to questions of equity and validity. Also, along the lines of discussion from Phase Three, it would perhaps be worthwhile to conduct a more widespread qualitative study based around the perceptions people across Mississippi have

about public education, their local public schools, and what changes and/or improvements they would like to see moving forward.

Conclusion

This research project was conducted as a case study of the 2016 Mississippi Statewide Accountability System, attempting to analyze the model for accuracy, equity, and consequences, in the hope of answering the central research question:

Is the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System an effective policy tool to accomplish the stated goals of (1) promoting public understanding of school performance and (2) improving performance of schools and districts?

With all three phases of the analysis completed, through the use of the three research sub-questions, one may conclude the MSAS is not an effective policy tool, as evidenced through an analysis of documentation, quantitative comparisons of results, and interviews with stakeholders at various levels of involvement with the model. As the data collected for this study has made clear, many people throughout the state of Mississippi are completely unaware of the details of the model and how or what components are being scored, while the lowest-performing school districts are saddled with socio-economic and cultural issues that are both directly and indirectly tied to the accountability rating. Finally, there is significant evidence that instead of measuring which schools are succeeding and which are not, the MSAS may instead be highlighting the vast differences between communities which are thriving in terms of population, economics, and opportunities, versus those who have stagnated. There is also evidence the lowest-performing districts serve student populations who are disproportionately impacted by poverty and other related factors. While there are many positive aspects of the model, especially by comparison to

the previous system, there are still several issues and problem areas in need of further research and discussion.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MSAS DOCUMENTATION – MPSAS 2016

(Note: This is an abbreviated excerpt from the overall MPSAS 2016 document, the full document is available on the MDE website as cited in the reference section.)

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

INTRODUCTION

The accountability system is designed to improve student achievement and increase the level of accountability for both school districts and individual schools. The accountability model focuses on student achievement at each school and at the district level.

Performance standards have been established, and student assessment data from the statewide assessment program will be used to determine individual school performance classifications and district level performance classifications.

The following specifications for establishing school and district performance standards and accountability requirements are addressed in Sections § 37-18-1 through 7 of the *Mississippi Code of 1972*, Annotated.

The State Board of Education (SBE) shall establish, design, and implement a program for identifying and rewarding public schools that improve. Upon full implementation of the statewide testing program, the State Board of Education shall apply an "A," "B," "C," "D," and "F" designation to the school and school district statewide accountability performance classification labels.

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

- . (a) Does not meet its growth expectation and has a percentage of students functioning below grade level, as designated by the State Board of Education;
- . (b) Is designated as a Level 1 School, or other future comparable performance designation by the State Board of Education; or
- . (c) Is designated as a Level 2 School, or other future comparable performance designation by the State Board of Education, for two (2) consecutive years.

Note: Section § 37-17-6, as amended in 2013, includes the following definitions for Proficiency and Growth: The State Department of Education shall establish five (5) performance categories ("A," "B," "C," "D," and "F") for the accountability system based on the following criteria:

- . (i) Student Achievement: the percent of students proficient and advanced on the

current state assessments

- . (ii) Individual Student Growth: the percent of students making one (1) year's progress in one (1) year's time on the state assessment, with an emphasis on the progress of the lowest twenty-five percent (25%) of students in the school or district

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ENGLISH LEARNERS (EL)

The Mississippi Statewide Assessment System provides procedures to ensure the inclusion of all students in the assessment programs, including a wide range of testing accommodations, instructional level testing on the MCT2, SATP2, and alternate assessments. The data for students using testing accommodations are treated no differently from any other test data. The scores for students with disabilities taking alternate assessments are included in the achievement and growth components. The weighting procedures in the achievement component ensure that those students count equally within the achievement level assigned to the school.

School districts are allowed to exclude the academic achievement results only for first-year English Learners (EL) students (on a case-by-case basis) from determinations of Mississippi Statewide Accountability System results, consistent with the requirements for ESEA federal accountability.

Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2016 ²³

MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM, EFFECTIVE 2013-2014

Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, accountability labels will be assigned based on the following school grading assignments:

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

1. Reading Proficiency

2. Reading Growth – All Students

3. Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students

4. Math Proficiency

5. Math Growth – All Students

6. Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students

7. Science Proficiency

For schools (and districts) with a grade 12, the following schedule will be used:

During the 2013-2014 school year, schools (and districts) with a grade 12 will have 9 components, totaling 900 possible points:

1. Reading Proficiency (100 points)

2. Reading Growth – All Students (100 points)

3. Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)

4. Math Proficiency (100 points)

5. Math Growth – All Students (100 points)

6. Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)

7. Science Proficiency (50 points)

8. U.S. History Proficiency (50 points)

9. Graduation Rate – All Students (200 points)

During the 2014-2015 school year, schools (and districts) with a grade 12 will have 9 components, totaling 900 possible points:

1. Reading Proficiency (100 points)

2. Reading Growth – All Students (100 points)

3. Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)

- 4.Math Proficiency (100 points)
- 5.Math Growth – All Students (100 points)
- 6.Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)
- 7.Science Proficiency (50 points)
- 8.U.S. History Proficiency (50 points)
- 9.Graduation Rate – All Students (200 points)
10. Deleted

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

- 1.Reading Proficiency (100 points)
- 2.Reading Growth – All Students (100 points)
- 3.Reading Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)
- 4.Math Proficiency (100 points)
- 5.Math Growth – All Students (100 points)
- 6.Math Growth – Lowest Performing Students (100 points)
- 7.Science Proficiency (50 points)
- 8.U.S. History Proficiency (50 points)
- 9.Graduation Rate – All Students (200 points)
10. College & Career Readiness (Math 50% and English/Reading 50%) (50 points)

Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2016 24

(Note: The CCR component is contingent upon legislative funding.) 11. Acceleration

(Participation and Performance Combined) 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)

APPENDIX B: MSAS DOCUMENTATION – MISSISSIPPI SENATE BILL 2396

SENATE BILL NO. 2396
(As Sent to Governor)

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-17-6, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO
2 AUTHORIZE AND DIRECT THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ACTING
3 THROUGH THE MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON SCHOOL ACCREDITATION, TO
4 ESTABLISH A SINGLE "A" THROUGH "F" SCHOOL AND DISTRICT
5 ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM SATISFYING FEDERAL AND STATE ACCOUNTABILITY
6 REQUIREMENTS AND TO PRESCRIBE STANDARDS FOR THAT SYSTEM; AND FOR
7 RELATED PURPOSES.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

9 SECTION 1. Section 37-17-6, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
10 amended as follows:

11 * * *

12 37-17-6. (1) The State Board of Education, acting through
13 the Commission on School Accreditation, shall establish and
14 implement a permanent performance-based accreditation system, and
15 all public elementary and secondary schools shall be accredited
16 under this system.

17 (2) No later than June 30, 1995, the State Board of
18 Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation,
19 shall require school districts to provide school classroom space



20 that is air-conditioned as a minimum requirement for
21 accreditation.

22 (3) (a) Beginning with the 1994-1995 school year, the State
23 Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School
24 Accreditation, shall require that school districts employ
25 certified school librarians according to the following formula:

26	Number of Students	Number of Certified
27	Per School Library	School Librarians
28	0 - 499 Students	1/2 Full-time Equivalent 29 Certified Librarian
30	500 or More Students	1 Full-time Certified 31 Librarian

32 (b) The State Board of Education, however, may increase
33 the number of positions beyond the above requirements.

34 (c) The assignment of certified school librarians to
35 the particular schools shall be at the discretion of the local
36 school district. No individual shall be employed as a certified
37 school librarian without appropriate training and certification as
38 a school librarian by the State Department of Education.

39 (d) School librarians in the district shall spend at
40 least fifty percent (50%) of direct work time in a school library
41 and shall devote no more than one-fourth (1/4) of the workday to
42 administrative activities that are library related.



43 (e) Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit any
44 school district from employing more certified school librarians
45 than are provided for in this section.

46 (f) Any additional millage levied to fund school
47 librarians required for accreditation under this subsection shall
48 be included in the tax increase limitation set forth in Sections
49 37-57-105 and 37-57-107 and shall not be deemed a new program for
50 purposes of the limitation.

51 (4) On or before December 31, 2002, the State Board of
52 Education shall implement the performance-based accreditation
53 system for school districts and for individual schools which shall
54 include the following:

55 (a) High expectations for students and high standards
56 for all schools, with a focus on the basic curriculum;

57 (b) Strong accountability for results with appropriate
58 local flexibility for local implementation;

59 (c) A process to implement accountability at both the
60 school district level and the school level;

61 (d) Individual schools shall be held accountable for
62 student growth and performance;

63 (e) Set annual performance standards for each of the
64 schools of the state and measure the performance of each school
65 against itself through the standard that has been set for it;



66 (f) A determination of which schools exceed their
67 standards and a plan for providing recognition and rewards to
68 those schools;

69 (g) A determination of which schools are failing to
70 meet their standards and a determination of the appropriate role
71 of the State Board of Education and the State Department of
72 Education in providing assistance and initiating possible
73 intervention. A failing district is a district that fails to meet
74 both the absolute student achievement standards and the rate of
75 annual growth expectation standards as set by the State Board of
76 Education for two (2) consecutive years. The State Board of
77 Education shall establish the level of benchmarks by which
78 absolute student achievement and growth expectations shall be
79 assessed. In setting the benchmarks for school districts, the
80 State Board of Education may also take into account such factors
81 as graduation rates, dropout rates, completion rates, the extent
82 to which the school or district employs qualified teachers in
83 every classroom, and any other factors deemed appropriate by the
84 State Board of Education. The State Board of Education, acting
85 through the State Department of Education, shall apply a simple
86 "A," "B," "C," "D" and "F" designation to the current school and
87 school district statewide accountability performance
88 classification labels beginning with the State Accountability
89 Results for the 2011-2012 school year and following, and in the
90 school, district and state report cards required under state and



91 federal law. Under the new designations, a school or school
92 district that has earned a "Star" rating shall be designated an
93 "A" school or school district; a school or school district that
94 has earned a "High-Performing" rating shall be designated a "B"
95 school or school district; a school or school district that has
96 earned a "Successful" rating shall be designated a "C" school or
97 school district; a school or school district that has earned an
98 "Academic Watch" rating shall be designated a "D" school or school
99 district; a school or school district that has earned a
100 "Low-Performing," "At-Risk of Failing" or "Failing" rating shall
101 be designated an "F" school or school district. Effective with
102 the implementation of any new curriculum and assessment standards,
103 the State Board of Education, acting through the State Department
104 of Education, is further authorized and directed to change the
105 school and school district accreditation rating system to a simple
106 "A," "B," "C," "D," and "F" designation based on a combination of
107 student achievement scores and student growth as measured by the
108 statewide testing programs developed by the State Board of
109 Education pursuant to Chapter 16, Title 37, Mississippi Code of
110 1972. In any statute or regulation containing the former
111 accreditation designations, the new designations shall be
112 applicable;

113 (h) Development of a comprehensive student assessment
114 system to implement these requirements; and



115 (i) The State Board of Education may, based on a
116 written request that contains specific reasons for requesting a
117 waiver from the school districts affected by Hurricane Katrina of
118 2005, hold harmless school districts from assignment of district
119 and school level accountability ratings for the 2005-2006 school
120 year. The State Board of Education upon finding an extreme
121 hardship in the school district may grant the request. It is the
122 intent of the Legislature that all school districts maintain the
123 highest possible academic standards and instructional programs in
124 all schools as required by law and the State Board of Education.

125 * * *

126 (5) (a) Effective with the 2013-2014 school year, the State
127 Department of Education, acting through the Mississippi Commission
128 on School Accreditation, shall revise and implement a single "A"
129 through "F" school and school district accountability system
130 complying with applicable federal and state requirements in order
131 to reach the following educational goals:

132 (i) To mobilize resources and supplies to ensure
133 that all students exit third grade reading on grade level by 2015;

134 (ii) To reduce the student dropout rate to
135 thirteen percent (13%) by 2015; and

136 (iii) To have sixty percent (60%) of students
137 scoring proficient and advanced on the assessments of the Common
138 Core State Standards by 2016 with incremental increases of three
139 percent (3%) each year thereafter.



140 (b) The State Department of Education shall combine the
141 state school and school district accountability system with the
142 federal system in order to have a single system.

143 (c) The State Department of Education shall establish
144 five (5) performance categories ("A," "B," "C," "D" and "F") for
145 the accountability system based on the following criteria:

146 (i) Student Achievement: the percent of students
147 proficient and advanced on the current state assessments;

148 (ii) Individual student growth: the percent of
149 students making one (1) year's progress in one (1) year's time on
150 the state assessment, with an emphasis on the progress of the
151 lowest twenty-five percent (25%) of students in the school or
152 district;

153 (iii) Four-year graduation rate: the percent of
154 students graduating with a standard high school diploma in four
155 (4) years, as defined by federal regulations;

156 (iv) Categories shall identify schools as Reward
157 ("A" schools), Focus ("D" schools) and Priority ("F" schools). If
158 at least five percent (5%) of schools in the state are not graded
159 as "F" schools, the lowest five percent (5%) of school grade point
160 designees will be identified as Priority schools. If at least ten
161 percent (10%) of schools in the state are not graded as "D"
162 schools, the lowest ten percent (10%) of school grade point
163 designees will be identified as Focus schools;



APPENDIX C: MSAS DOCUMENTATION -
A REVIEW OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

A Review of the Accountability Standards of the Mississippi Department of Education

Executive Summary

In response to a legislative request, PEER conducted a review of the Mississippi Department of Education's accountability standards to address concerns of whether the standards adequately measure school performance.

State accountability standards must be designed in such a way that they effectively demonstrate actual school performance. If standards do not reflect actual student performance, education stakeholders and decisionmakers cannot make the appropriate decisions or necessary adjustments to improve schools' and districts' performance.

MDE's accountability standards were created in order to communicate how well Mississippi's schools and districts are performing, to identify schools and districts that need improvement, and to advise decisionmakers on necessary adjustments. Although college and career readiness was not included in the original purpose of the standards, as Mississippi shifts toward what will likely be more rigorous standards, college and career readiness will begin to shape the overall purpose of the state accountability standards.

The Accountability Standards Task Force, the membership of which is approved by the Mississippi Board of Education, makes accountability standards recommendations to the Commission on School Accreditation. Once recommendations are approved by the commission, the Board of Education provides the final approval before new standards or changes in standards go into effect. Selected staff at the department provide information necessary for the task force to make accountability standards recommendations.

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, changes in Mississippi state law, federal requirements, and the desire to make the accountability standards equitable for all schools and districts and easier to understand led to the adoption of MDE's current accountability standards.

MDE uses five different assessments to determine schools' and districts' accountability grades. These assessments are administered at various grade levels within schools and districts. After students take the assessments, MDE uses each student's *scale score* to determine that student's placement within one of four achievement categories (advanced, proficient, basic, or minimal).^A

MDE then uses the percentage of students that a school or district has in the top two achievement categories (i. e., advanced and proficient) to determine that school's or district's accountability grade. MDE uses seven components (i. e., 700 possible points) to determine a grade for a school with no twelfth grade^B or a district with no high school and nine components (i. e., 900 possible points) to determine a grade for a school with a twelfth grade or a district with a high school. The components and their possible points are illustrated in Exhibit A, page ix.

MDE then uses cut-points established by the Accountability Standards Task Force to determine what total score must be achieved for a school to receive an A, B, C, D, or F accountability grade. MDE's current cut-points are shown in Exhibit B, page ix.

The components of each school's or district's accountability grade contain three types of calculations: proficiency, growth, and graduation rate (see Exhibit A, page ix). Although MDE uses a graduation rate calculated in accordance with federal requirements (see page 26 of the report), the department has its own methods for calculating proficiency and growth, as follows:

proficiency--MDE determines proficiency by calculating the percentage of students who performed at or above the "proficient" achievement category on assessments. In other words, this is the percentage of students whose assessment score placed them in the proficient or advanced achievement category.

^A *Scaling* refers to the process of converting a student's raw test score to a common score that allows for comparison between students.

^B An example of a school with no twelfth grade would be an elementary school. viii PEER

Exhibit A: Components of a School’s or District’s Accountability Grade, as of 2013-2014 Assessment Year

Components	Without 12th Grade	With 12th Grade
	<i>700 Possible Points</i>	<i>900 Possible Points</i>
Reading Proficiency	100	100
Reading Growth-All Students	100	100
Reading Growth-Low 25% of Students	100	100
Math Proficiency	100	100
Math Growth-All Students	100	100
Math Growth-Low 25% of Students	100	100
Science Proficiency	100	50
U.S. History Proficiency		50
Graduation Rate-All Students*		200

*MDE uses a federally approved four-year graduation rate calculation (MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-17-6 [1972]). See page 26 of the report.

NOTE: MDE does not currently use “college and career readiness” and “acceleration” to calculate a school’s or district’s grade. However, according to MDE, these components will be included beginning with school year 2015- 2016 results. See pages 52-53 of the report for more information on these components.

SOURCE: MDE.

Exhibit B: MDE Cut-Points for Schools and Districts, as of 2013-2014 Assessment Year

Letter Grade	Cut-Point Range	
	Without 12 th grade	With 12 th grade
A	518 or higher	695 or higher
B	455-517	623-694
C	400-454	540-622
D	325-399	422-539
F	324 or lower	421 or lower

SOURCE: MDE.

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growth--MDE defines growth as the percentage of students who made “learning gains.” The department considers two areas of growth when determining a school’s or district’s accountability grade:

--

growth of all students, which refers to the percentage of students who made learning gains from one year’s assessment to the next year’s assessment; and,

growth of the lowest twenty-five percent of students, which refers to the percentage of students who scored in the low 25% of their class the previous testing year

who made learning gains between the previous year's assessment and the current year's assessment.

MDE uses the growth components only for math and reading/language arts because math and reading/language arts are tested every year in grades three through eight and once in high school.

graduation rate--MDE calculates this by determining the percentage of students who graduated in four years with a "regular high school diploma" (i. e., the standard high school diploma that is fully aligned with the state's academic content standards). MDE uses the number of students who graduated in four years from a school or district with a "regular high school diploma" as the numerator and the number of students who entered four years earlier as first-time ninth graders (with adjustments for deaths and transfers in and out) as the denominator. The method of calculating the graduation rate is prescribed by federal regulation.

Because of the way in which Mississippi's accountability standards are currently calculated, the standards do not provide stakeholders and the public with a clear picture of how Mississippi schools and districts are performing. Not only does the calculation of the current standards make it impossible to compare one school or district to another, but also to compare a school or district to itself over time. Mississippi's standardized tests are carefully constructed to ensure that a student has mastered a certain level of competency; those tests alone should provide the criterion/standard for measuring school performance.

The Effectiveness of MDE's Accountability Standards in Measuring School Performance

Achievement Categories Obscure Student Score Data

MDE's use of achievement categories obscures actual student test score data because all scores in an achievement category are basically considered to be equal, despite the wide range of scores within a category. Determining proficiency by calculating the percentage of students whose scores are in the top two achievement categories, described in MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-17-6 (5) (c) (i) (1972), compounds the problem because the range of scores deemed "proficient" is even wider, indicating an insensitive measurement instrument.

Combining Proficiency and Growth into a Single School Grade

Due to the way MDE's accountability grade components are structured, combining proficiency and growth to determine a

school's or district's accountability grade may not present the most accurate picture of actual student performance. PEER believes that growth is a very important factor in school performance, but if the way growth is calculated affects a school's or district's grade in such a way that it no longer demonstrates true student performance at that school or district, MDE's overall purpose of the accountability standards is not being fulfilled. If the purpose of the accountability standards is to improve student achievement and increase the level of accountability of schools and districts, then more emphasis should be placed on proficiency--how a student actually performs on the assessments.

Emphasis on Growth Fails to Demonstrate Actual School or District Performance

MDE emphasizes growth in order to ensure that lower performing schools or districts that are improving positively contribute to their school's or district's accountability grades and, as required by state statute, to emphasize the progress of the lowest twenty-five percent of students in the school or district.

However, because of the way MDE has structured its accountability standards, in certain situations (such as a student whose score places them in the low 25% of scores), a student's growth from one achievement category to another could be counted up to three times in the determination of the school's or district's accountability grade for a given year. Additionally, a school or district could appear to have made substantial growth gains, which might actually be inaccurate.

If proficiency scores are accurate, comparing proficiency scores from one year to the next or reporting scale scores divided by total possible scale score points would be other ways of showing whether a school or district improved from one year to the next.

Growth Multipliers Appear to be Arbitrary

MDE's assignment of weights for learning gains appears to be arbitrary and results in the obfuscation of data, which impedes MDE from reaching its goal of improving student achievement and increasing school and district accountability.

While it might seem beneficial to provide incentives for schools and districts to encourage them to reach a higher level of achievement, if those incentives obfuscate data

regarding actual student performance, the ultimate goal of improving student achievement and increasing school and district accountability has not been reached.

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The Clarity and Accuracy of the Accountability Standards' Presentation of Schools' and Districts' Performance

“Better of Two Years” and “Pausing” of Schools' and Districts' Grades

Although MDE developed its current accountability standards for use in the 2013-2014 assessment year, because of the implementation of college-and career-readiness standards that year, MDE has used “better of two years” or “pausing” adjustments to schools' and districts' accountability grades.

The “better of two years” adjustment meant that after having calculated the actual accountability grades for each school and district, MDE could decide, for each school and district, to apply the calculated grade based on the 2013-2014 assessment results or to retain the previous year's grade. “Pausing” means that rather than calculating actual accountability grades for each school and district for that assessment year and choosing the “better of two years,” if approved by the U. S. Department of Education, MDE may automatically apply the previous year's accountability grade.

These practices obscure the actual performance of students on assessments, therefore preventing MDE from making accurate comparisons among schools or districts to each other or to themselves over time. Further, accountability grades could reflect the accountability standards as they were calculated in a previous year rather than as they should be calculated in the current year.

How MDE Determines Accountability Grades for Six-Component Schools

Rather than determining cut-points for the accountability grades for schools without a twelfth grade and without a science assessment (i. e., six-component schools), MDE determines these accountability grades based on the actual distribution of grades for seven-component schools. MDE takes the A-F distribution of the actual grades of schools that have seven components and applies that distribution to the six- component schools. MDE then applies, or “links,” that distribution (i. e., the percentages for each A-F grade) to the six- component schools. This method forces the six-component schools into the seven-component distribution, reflecting the performance and growth of those schools rather than their own performance and growth.

The staff at MDE is aware of this problem and according to MDE, in May 2015 the Board of Education approved a rule that would address this problem.

The Method of Creating Assessment Benchmarks and Cut-Points is Not Criterion-Based

MDE’s current process for determining accountability grades is not being driven by student performance-; rather, a Mississippi teachers’ group determines the benchmarks for student performance. MDE, the task force, and the Technical Review Committee, with the help of a consultant, determine the cut- points for establishing the accountability grades each year, maintaining significant control over the outcome of accountability grades.

Thus the processes used to determine achievement category benchmarks, A-F cut-points, and the number of possible points for each accountability component are subjective rather than criterion-based. Moreover, the placement of benchmarks and cut-points can affect the magnitude of trends, possibly giving some schools and districts an advantage in their accountability grades.

Changes in Graduation Requirements

In 2013, the federal government began requiring that the graduation component had to account for twenty percent of a school’s or district’s accountability grade. At that time, a student could not graduate high school in Mississippi unless he or she passed each subject area test (i. e., English II, Algebra I, U. S. History, and Biology I).

In January 2014, the State Board of Education voted to allow students to graduate if they failed one or more of their subject area tests but met certain other requirements. In March 2015, the board amended this action to allow additional options. The perception is that MDE has made graduation more easily attainable, thus allowing schools and districts to have better graduation rates.

1.

In order for a school's or district's student proficiency to be represented accurately by its accountability grade, MDE should report performance grades that reflect student assessment score data as closely as possible. This could be done by:

- . eliminating the use of the four achievement categories (minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced); or,
- . reporting scale scores divided by total possible scale score points (in the form of a percentage). To accomplish this, the Legislature should amend MISS. CODE ANN. 37-17-6 (5) (c) (i) (1972).

(Note: When *proficiency* is referenced in other recommendations in this report, it is with the assumption that an accurate proficiency measure will be utilized.)

- . In order to communicate and report student proficiency and student growth accurately and to prevent either proficiency or growth from greatly affecting a school's or district's accountability grade, MDE should separate proficiency and growth into two separate grades. MDE could do so by assigning a letter grade (A thru F) for proficiency, followed by another indicator to represent growth. The department could use a letter grade to demonstrate proficiency and an arrow that indicates direction to reflect whether a school has made adequate learning gains. For example, a school that made learning gains and earned a B in proficiency would have a grade of B \rightarrow . However, a school that earned a B in proficiency, but did not make adequate learning gains, would have a grade of B \leftarrow .^c For the separation of scores to take place, the Legislature would need to amend MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-17-6 (4) (g) (1972) to allow for separate proficiency and growth indicators.
- . To ensure that a school's or district's growth is represented accurately in its accountability grade, MDE should indicate growth by a student's improvement from one year to the next in the accurate proficiency grade. MDE uses growth multipliers of 1, 1.2, or 1.25 to indicate greater growth, but any multiplier or incentive that alters an original score takes a rating farther away from accurately

demonstrating true performance.

- . To ensure that a school's or district's grade for a given year is a direct representation of that school's or district's performance for that year, MDE should instruct schools and districts to report and publicize not only their official grade, but also their "paused" or "waived" grades in any school year that is considered a transitional year. Allowing schools and districts the opportunity to publicize the better grade of two years, or an outdated school grade, does not provide a clear picture of current performance. Further, to ensure that schools' and districts' grades can be reliably compared to those of other schools or districts for that year and that a single school or district can analyze its performance over a period of time, MDE should report schools' and districts' grades using the

^CThe growth component is not a measure of performance; it seeks to communicate where a school or district stands relative to current performance. An A school or district that earns an A in proficiency would not have much (if any) room for growth and would not necessarily have an arrow indicator following the school's or district's grade.

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same accountability standards (as opposed to a previous year's standards or a previous year's grades).

8. To ensure that the A through F cut-points and assessment benchmarks are directly related to student mastery over material, MDE should develop a defensible criterion for being "proficient."
9. To ensure that the accountability standards accomplish what they are designed to accomplish, MDE should ensure that task force recommendations support the purpose of the accountability standards so that appropriate changes, where necessary, can be made.
10. In the best interest of the students and to acknowledge the distinct honor of successfully completing high school, MDE should develop a method to ensure that the changes made to the graduation options are equivalent and comparable to a standard/regular high school diploma.
11. The Legislature should enact legislation requiring that the Mississippi Department of Education submit any proposed changes to the school accountability standards to the appropriations and education committees of the House and Senate and to the

Executive Director of the Legislative Budget Office one year before those standards would become effective. Such submission should also include a statement of estimated economic impact detailing how the proposed changes could impact the development of recommendations for the funding of the adequate education program. This is important because school districts' accountability grades are figured into the MAEP formula^D and any changes in the way that a "successful" district (currently, a district receiving a C accountability grade) is defined will affect the calculation of the MAEP funding formula and thereby affect the amount of funding requested by MDE and ultimately the amount of funding received by school districts.

^DComponents of the MAEP funding formula process are defined in MISS. CODE ANN. Section 37-151-5 (1972). Currently, districts receiving a grade of C are classified as "successful" and if other statistical requirements are met, their expenditures form the base of the MAEP funding formula. Expenditures from districts receiving higher grades (A or B) or lower grades (D or F) impact the statistical calculations used in the MAEP formula, but expenditures from these districts do not otherwise impact the funding formula. The MAEP funding formula is calculated every four years, with adjustments for inflation during the intervening years. The most recent recalculation was for FY 2015. (A full recalculation of the MAEP funding formula will be completed for FY 2019.)

As noted above, MDE uses the MAEP formula to determine the amount of funding necessary to fund all schools at the funding level of the schools used in the formula that met the "successful" level of student performance. However, if the classification of student performance is flawed, as is illustrated in this report, the assumptions underlying the selection of schools to be used in the computation of funding are also flawed from a performance perspective.

APPENDIX D: MSAS DOCUMENTATION - MDE RESPONSE TO PEER REPORT



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

July 10, 2015

James Barber, Executive Director
Joint Legislative PEER Committee
Woolfolk Building
501 North West Street, Suite 301A
Jackson, Mississippi 39201

Dear Mr. Barber,

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has reviewed the PEER Committee report "A Review of Accountability Standards of the Mississippi Department of Education." While the evaluation is well-written and organized, the evaluators' chain-of-logic and evidence does not support many of the conclusions. The report does not provide either empirical or research-based evidence to support many conclusions. Further, technical misinterpretations suggest subject-matter experts in the fields of psychometrics, accountability systems, and statistics may not have fully reviewed the findings or recommendations.

Specifically, the report outlined the following concerns and public perceptions related to the performance standards, which are part of the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System. MDE's rationale regarding the conclusions follows each of these concerns.

PEER Concern: MDE's calculation of students' scores on assessments, upon which the accountability standards are based, does not offer a clear picture of how schools and districts are actually performing, nor does it show whether schools and districts have achieved what they are supposed to have achieved.

MDE Response: Many state education accountability systems use performance categories precisely because it clearly incorporates the assessment standard into the system. Indeed, Mississippi's criterion referenced tests are designed for the explicit purpose of classifying with the highest degree of precision student performance with respect to these standards. Any assertion that scale scores should be the primary driver of accountability determinations is incomplete without consideration of the error associated with interpreting unit level changes in scores which may be within the standard error of measurement. In other words, scale score based indicators are prone to false-precision that is not recognized in the recommendations.

PEER Concern: The U. S. Department of Education's voluntary waiver that allows schools to choose the higher of two years' grades (for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years) does not make it possible to compare a school's accountability grade from one year to another or to compare the grades of several schools or districts over time.

MDE Response: MDE has provided data on its public reporting website with all the resulting calculations, with and without the "waived" result, since the State Board of Education (SBE) approved the results on October 17, 2014. The file is available on MDE's public reporting webpage, as well as through MDE's official [news release](#) regarding 2014 Accountability Results.

PEER Concern: Certain multipliers included in a school's or district's accountability grade calculation result in inflation of schools' and districts' grades.

MDE Response: The growth metric includes weighting achievement levels in order to incentivize improvement in student performance from one year to the next. The growth indicators are combined with status indicators to create an overall score. This compensatory design reduces the misclassification of schools and districts. The evaluators' recommendation would increase the misclassification of the accountability determinations, thus resulting in spurious results. The evaluators' provided no empirical data supporting their recommendation. Further, they provided neither actual nor simulated analytics demonstrating that additional conjunctive decisions would have misclassification (i.e., Kappa) indices similar the SBE's current design.

PRER Concern: Some of MDE's Accountability Task Force's decision-making practices do not align with the overall purpose of the accountability standards.

MDE Response: The agency selected and applied a standard-setting approach that has extensive research supporting the validity of the approach. The agency used panelists who were subject matter experts in the area of educational leadership and management (e.g., principals, supervisors, superintendents) to recommend cut-scores for the State Board of Education's consideration.

PEER Concern: MDE's ability to create assessment benchmarks and cut-points or the accountability grades gives the department an inappropriate amount of control over these grades.

MDE Response: The literature has demonstrated the volatility of growth-based metrics. This volatility is in part ameliorated by including status indicators, using multiple data waves, and ensuring only reliable assessment results (low standard error of measure) are included. The inclusion of growth-based metrics with status-

based metrics increases the robustness of the accountability design. The addition of a growth-metric improves the goodness-of-fit of the accountability model to predict accountability ratings.

The documents that follow support the existing accountability system. Each recommendation from the PEER Committee report is addressed. The resumes for MDE's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and key members of the Technical Review Team provide evidence of the quality of the team vetting the system. It should be noted that these individuals have extensive experience in designing accountability and assessment systems and are recognized as national experts in their fields. I requested the resumes of those who conducted the review and only received the degrees they obtained, as shown in the attachment. I question the technical sufficiency of the PEER Review Team, which is needed to evaluate, draw conclusions, and formulate design recommendations for state assessment and accountability systems.

The performance standards of the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System are a high-quality set of indicators of school effectiveness, intended to improve student outcomes. The system, developed through a multi-year deliberate process of stakeholder feedback and research-based best practice, reflects a very different philosophical approach to school accountability than the report illustrates. The MDE has worked diligently to ensure reliability and validity in these indicators of school success, incorporating both state and federal statute into one coherent model to measure school performance.

Sincerely,


Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Attachments: MDE Response to PEER Accountability Report
Vitas/Resumes of:

- Joint Legislative PEER Committee
- MDE Technical Advisory Committee for Assessment and Accountability
- MDE Technical Review Team, External Assessment and Accountability Members

APPENDIX E:

MSAS DOCUMENTATION – MDE ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLKIT DOCUMENTS (1)



Ensuring a bright *future* for every child

Mississippi School and District Grading System

The A-F grading scale is a way to identify how well students are performing in school, especially on tests and assignments. For school or district grades, it is important to understand that several factors are taken into consideration.

Mississippi's school grading system considers several indicators, including how well students perform on state tests, whether students are showing improvement on those tests from year to year and whether students are graduating within four years. The system also factors in how well schools are helping their lowest achieving students make progress toward proficiency.

History and Goal:

- . The Mississippi Legislature passed, in 2013, Sections 37-18-1 through 7 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, which required the state to implement an A-F grading scale for schools.
- . Section 37-17-6, as amended in 2013, includes the following definitions for Proficiency and Growth: The State Department of Education shall establish five (5) performance categories ("A," "B," "C," "D," and "F") for the accountability system based on the following criteria:

o Student Achievement: the percent of students proficient and advanced on the current state assessments

o Individual Student Growth: the

percent of students making one (1) year's progress in one (1) year's time on the state assessment, with an emphasis on the progress of the lowest 25 percent of students in the school or district

- The goal is to help parents and the public better understand how well a school is performing and to begin conversations to continually improve education.

What the Grades Represent:

- . How well students are performing in math and English language arts on state assessments.
- . Whether students in the school are meeting annual expected growth in math and English language arts.
- . How well students are performing in U.S. History and Science
- . Whether high school students are graduating on time.
- . Whether students are participating in and performing well in accelerated coursework, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) classes, and dual credit college courses.
- . How students perform on ACT
- . Whether there are large differences between the achievement levels among students, especially students who receive additional educational services.
- . Whether a school is performing above expectations.

What the Grades Are Not:

12. They do not measure how well an individual student or teacher is doing.
13. They do not take into consideration other things the school may be doing well, such as meeting students' emotional/social or health needs or how well students are performing in other subject areas.



Ensuring a bright future for every child

Who Was Involved in the Development of the Accountability Model?

10. Legislators
11. Superintendents
12. Administrators
13. Mississippi Department of Education
14. Business and Policy Leaders **What Parents Can Do:**
 11. Become aware of how well schools are performing in the community.
 12. Talk with teachers and school officials about how to help the school.

13. Volunteer at school and engage in areas that need improvement.
14. Ensure children have excellent attendance, complete all assignments, and are engaged in learning. **School Grades and Grading Scale Elementary and Middle Schools - 700 points** A= 455 to 700 points B = 385 to 454 points C = 330 to 384 points D = 277 to 329 points F = Less than 277 points **High Schools – 1,000 Points** A = 738 to 1,000 points B = 626 to 737 points C = 552 to 625 points D= 470 to 551 points F = Less than 470 points **School Districts – 1,000 Points** A = 672 to 1,000 points B =588 to 671 points C = 523 to 587 points D= 464 to 522 points F = Less than 464 points Grades are assigned to schools based on points earned. Schools earn points in several categories, such as performance, growth, and graduation rate (for high schools). Additional information about categories and points possible for each category can be found [here](#).



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Ensuring a bright future for every child

Performance Level Classifications: 700 Point Schools

Ra ti ng	Descriptor	Characte ristic
A	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are in the top quartile of performance. Reading and Mathematics growth in the all students group is above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading and Mathematics growth component.	Highest Status Highest Growth Subgroup Growth
B	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are above the state median for the given year. Reading or Mathematics growth in the all students group is above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading and Mathematics growth component.	High Status Typical Growth Subgroup Growth

C	Reading, Mathematics, or Science proficiency rates are above the state median for the given year; however, no rate is in the lowest quartile. Reading and Mathematics growth in the all students group is above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.	Typical Status Typical Growth Subgroup Growth
D	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are below the state median for the given year. Reading or Mathematics growth in the all students group is below the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup did not earn at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.	Low Status Low Growth Low Subgroup Growth
F	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are in the first quartile for the given year. Reading and Mathematics growth in the all students group is below the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup did not earn at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.	Lowest Status Low Growth Low Subgroup Growth

Performance Level Classifications: 1000 Point Schools & Districts



Ra t.	Descriptor	Charact.
A	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are in the top quartile of performance. Reading and Mathematics growth in the all students group is above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading and Mathematics growth component.	Highest Status Highest Growth Subgroup Growth
B	Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are above the state median for the given year. Reading or Mathematics growth in the all students group is above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading and Mathematics growth component.	High Status Typical Growth Subgroup Growth
C	Reading, Mathematics, or Science proficiency rates are above the state median for the given year; however, no rate is in the lowest quartile. At least three of the five additional performance indicators (Reading growth, Mathematics growth, History proficiency, graduation rates, college & career readiness, and acceleration in the all students group) are above the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup earned at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.	Typical Status Typical Growth Subgroup Growth

D	<p>Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are below the state median for the given year. Reading or Mathematics growth in the all students group is below the state median for the given year. At least two of the three additional performance indicators (History proficiency, graduation rates, college & career readiness, and acceleration in the all students group) are below the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup did not earn at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.</p>	<p>Low Status Low Growth Low Subgroup Growth</p>
F	<p>Reading, Mathematics, and Science proficiency rates are in the first quartile for the given year. Reading or Mathematics growth in the all students group is not above the first quartile for the given year. The three additional performance indicators (History proficiency, graduation rates, college & career readiness, and acceleration in the all students group) are below the state median for the given year. The lowest 25% subgroup did not earn at least 50 points in the Reading or Mathematics growth component.</p>	<p>Lowest Status Lowest Growth Low Subgroup Growth</p>

APPENDIX F:

MSAS DOCUMENTATION – MDE ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLKIT DOCUMENTS (2)



Ensuring a bright *future* for every child

Important Facts about School and District Accountability

- . 1) Mississippi's school grading system is **designed to inform parents and communities** how well their schools and districts are educating students.
- . 2) Mississippi's accountability system is set by **state law**.
- . 3) The A-F **grading system considers several indicators**, including how well students perform on state tests, whether students are showing improvement on those tests from year to year and whether students are graduating within four years. The system also factors in how well schools are helping their lowest achieving students make progress toward proficiency.
- . 4) There is **no limit** to the number of schools or districts that can earn a particular grade.
- . 5) The 2015-16 accountability results mark a **new starting point** for schools and districts and cannot be compared to previous accountability results because new measures have been included this year and students took a new test.
- . 6) Mississippi students are taking **more challenging tests than in years past**. They are not the simple fill-in-the bubble end-of-year exams. These tests ask questions that require students to explain their reasoning. They measure more complex, real-world skills, such as critical-thinking, writing, and problem solving.
- . 7) We are holding students to a **much higher standard** so they can be successful in college or the workforce.
- . 8) School and district performance **will improve over time**. Anytime the bar is raised for learning, student performance dips, but as students and teachers get used to the new tests, achievement will increase.

- . 9) We believe that higher standards and more challenging assessments **will better help students achieve** their full potential. Your support of our schools and districts as we continue to take on the challenge of lifting student achievement in Mississippi is greatly valued and appreciated.

APPENDIX G:

MSAS DOCUMENTATION – MDE ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLKIT DOCUMENTS (3)

Family Guide to the MAP Score Reports

The Mississippi Assessment Program (MAP) tests measure whether students are meeting higher academic standards and mastering the knowledge and skills they need to progress in their K-12 education and beyond. They test more complex skills like critical-thinking, persuasive writing, and problem-solving – skills that were not measured on previous state tests. Scores may look different on this new test.

Key Information Provided in the Score Report

- . **Pass/Did Not Pass** – This section of the report shows your student’s test score, performance level and whether you student achieved a level of content knowledge to be considered passing. Students scoring levels 3, 4, and 5 have achieved a level of content knowledge to be considered passing. Levels 1 and 2 indicate a student is not yet meeting grade level expectations. Additional information about the five levels of performance is below.
- . **ELA/Math Score Comparison** – The score reports show how your student is performing compared to students in the same grade at the same school, across the school district, and around the state. It also shows the score ranges for each performance level and where your child’s score falls within that range. This gives you an indication of how close your child is to achieving the next level.

What do Performance Levels (PL) mean?

Performance Level (PL) descriptors describe the specific knowledge and skills that a student at a given performance level should be able to demonstrate. How a student performed on the assessment will be shown on the score report. The five performance levels are as follows:

Minimal – Level 1

A student performing at Level 1 **inconsistently demonstrates the knowledge or skills** that define basic level performance.

Basic – Level 2

Students at Level 2 demonstrate **partial mastery of the knowledge and skills** in the course and may experience difficulty in the next grade or course in the content area. These students are able to meet some of the content standards at a low level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency as specified by the grade-level content standards.

Passing – Level 3

Students at Level 3 demonstrate **general mastery of the knowledge and skills** required for success in the grade or course in the content area. These students are able to perform approaching the level or at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the grade-level content standards.

Proficient – Level 4

Students at Level 4 demonstrate **solid academic performance and mastery of the knowledge and skills** required for success in the grade or course in the content area. These students are able to perform at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the grade-level content standards.

Advanced – Level 5

Students at the Level 5 **consistently perform in a manner clearly beyond what is required to be successful** in the grade or course in the content area. These students are able to perform at a high level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency as specified by the grade-level content standards.

What's the difference between passing (Level 3) and proficient (Level 4)?

The goal is for all students to be **proficient**. Proficient means a student

has fully met the expectations of a grade level. Passing means the student has met the minimum requirements expected at that grade level. Students who score between Levels 1-3 need additional supports to meet proficiency expectations.

What now? How the MAP score report can be used to enhance your child's education:

- .
 - ·Schools and districts can use the report information to better plan instruction, support, and enrichment for students.
- .
 - ·Teachers can use this information to personalize instruction to meet individual student needs.
- .
 - ·It is important to have regular check-ins with teachers to help ensure your child is learning the skills necessary to remain on track. ▪

Resources for parents of children in grades K-8 are available here:
[Read-At-Home Plan](#)

APPENDIX H: DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following protocol will be used when conducting interviews with stakeholders involved in the development and implantation of the MSAS.

Site Details. As these interviews will take place with a variety of stakeholders in various offices, who may or may not be continuing to serve in the role which provided for their involvement in this case study, no specific site will be designated for the interviews. The researcher will either speak to these stakeholders using any available methods, whether phone calls, emails, or face-to-face meetings. The researcher will be cognizant of each individual's time and effort and attempt to keep these interactions brief and focused to maximize the value of the data being collected, while also not acting as an inconvenience to the particular stakeholder.

Interviewee Selection. In regards to the development of the model, it will be beneficial to begin within the Office of District Accreditation, within the Division of Research and Development at MDE, as this office is responsible for releasing the MPSAS documentation. Paula Vanderford, who is listed as the Executive Secretary for the Commission on School Accreditation, or any members of the commission would be a useful starting point. In addition, Dr. J.P. Beaudoin, who at the time served as the Chief of the Division of Research and Development, could also provide insight about the model, as well as additional contacts who were involved in the development process. Ideally, these individuals and/or their offices could provide additional persons who could contribute to this aspect of the data collection.

Interview Protocol. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher will thank the individual stakeholder for their participation and explain the purpose and scope of the case study. The researcher will begin with a series of simplified questions such as the following:

- What role did you play in the development of the MSAS?

- Who were the leaders involved in the creation of the MSAS?
- What goals, if any, were discussed at the outset of the development of the MSAS?

From there, the researcher will begin to probe for more in-depth information using more specific and detailed questions, such as the following:

- What, if any, other state models were used as examples in the development process?
- What research or theory, if any, was used in developing the model?
- How were determinations about key aspects of the model, such as the components being measured or scale cut-scores for assigning grades, decided upon?

Ideally, this line of questioning will lead to further follow-up questioning which will provide more in-depth data to the benefit of the case study. If these stakeholders are willing to speak candidly about the process of developing the MSAS, the data they provide could answer many questions surrounding the implementation of the model and allow for a more comprehensive analysis in terms of the central research questions of this research study.

Data Transcription. If the interviewees consent, these conversations will be recorded for data-collection purposes, which when paired with the researcher's notes from the interview, will be transcribed and organized for further analysis. Any patterns, or even potential outliers, within this data could prove beneficial to the outcome of this case study.

APPENDIX I: COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following protocol will be used when conducting interviews, based on qualitative procedures described by Creswell (2009).

Site details. The researcher will visit a total of six sites, with each one corresponding to a school district described in the analysis portion of this case study, with three sites coming from the list of the top-15 rated school districts according to the MSAS 2015-2016 accountability results, and the other three sites coming from the list of the bottom-15 school districts. These sites will be purposely sampled using criteria such as geographic location and district size to create an easier comparability. At each site, the researcher will attempt to schedule meetings with participants, while also approaching individuals randomly at locations throughout a community. If the individual agrees to participate, the researcher will select a location for the interview where the interviewee feels comfortable, such as their office, a local restaurant, etc. Each interview session will last from approximately 25 to 30 minutes.

Interviewee Selection. As the researcher is not a member of any of these communities, initiating contact with someone within the community who has a knowledge of the area and potential interviewees for the research study is critical. The researcher will begin by contacting a connected individual within the community, whether the district superintendent, a city council member, a member of the local chamber of commerce, a pastor of a local church, etc. From there the researcher will attempt to use this initial contact to connect to potential interviewees within the community. It will be important for the research process to get individuals from a wide range of roles within the community, be it the business, government, education, or religious sectors. By having a random (at least from the perspective of the researcher) group of individuals

with diverse roles within the community, there is an increased likelihood of gaining several unique perspectives on the key research questions central to this study.

Interview Protocol. Each interview will begin with the researcher thanking the interviewees for their participation and discussing physical issues related to the space and the interview. The research will then begin by reading a prepared statement describing the nature of the research study and the purpose and value of the interviews being conducted. The researcher will also address issues of confidentiality, a description of the recording processes being used, as well as the importance of honesty when answering the interview questions. At this point, the researcher will allow each interviewee to introduce himself or herself and describe their connection to the community and/or school district.

Interview Questioning. Next, the researcher will begin the interview. The researcher will begin with an informal, ice-breaker question to get the conversation started and allow the participants to become comfortable with the setting. This question may be something such as:

What is the one thing you remember most about your high school experience?

Once the interviewees have responded, the researcher will begin probing into questions aimed at answering the central research question and sub-questions associated with the case study. These questions will be centered around two primary themes: first, whether MSAS provides them, as community members, with useful information about the performance of schools within their local system; and second, what impact, if any, the MSAS accountability rankings have on different aspects of their community, either individually or as the community as a whole. Below are some potential questions aimed at answering these questions:

- To what extent do you understand the accountability model and the resulting grades?

- What does your school district's rating tell you about student and teacher performance?
- Do you feel your school district's grades accurately reflect the quality of the schools?
- Do you think poor performance ratings have any negative impact on the local community?
- What are some non-academic factors that are potentially contributing to poor school performance?

It is critical for the researcher to allow the participants to adequately express their thoughts and opinions in response to these questions, while also keeping the interview process moving appropriately in order to complete the necessary steps within the stated time frame. It is also important to use follow-up questions to continue to probe for more in-depth responses, which could potentially add to the data being gathered. The researcher will close by summarizing the main ideas gathered from the responses of the participants and, finally, thanking all involved for their participation and assistance in the completion of this case study.

Data Transcription. The audio recordings of these interview sessions as well as the notes taken by the researcher will then be transcribed in order to facilitate efficient analysis and contribution to the overall research study. For example, the researcher will look for patterns in the interview data, especially in terms of the differences between the communities with districts in the top-15 versus those with districts in the bottom-15 according to the MSAS accountability data. This information will be included in the appendices of the final draft of the case study.

VITA

Justin Andrew Geurin, Ph.D.
Curriculum Vitae
(870) 918-7084 | jageurin@gmail.com

Personal:

- Married to wife, Robin, since 2007. Twin daughters, Elizabeth and Lillian, were born in December of 2014. Expecting a son in January of 2018.

Education:

2017	Ph.D. – Educational Leadership Institution: The University of Mississippi; University, MS Dissertation: <i>An Exploratory Analysis: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of the Construct Validity of the 2016 Mississippi Statewide Accountability System</i> Dissertation Chair: Dr. Doug Davis, Associate Professor
2012	Ed.S. – Educational Leadership Institution: The University of Mississippi; University, MS
2010	M.A. – Curriculum and Instruction Institution: The University of Mississippi; University, MS
2009	B.A. – Secondary Social Studies Education Institution: University of Louisiana Monroe; Monroe, LA

Education Related Employment:

2016 – 2017	The University of Mississippi; University, MS Graduate Assistant – Dept. of Leadership and Counselor Education Report to Dr. Doug Davis
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2015	Water Valley School District (MS) Principal – Water Valley High School Report to Dr. Michael McInnis
2013 – 2015	Water Valley School District (MS) Assistant Principal – Water Valley High School Report to Dr. Glenn Kitchens
2010 – 2013	South Panola School District (MS) Social Studies Teacher – South Panola High School Report to Mr. Tim Fowler (2011-2013)
2009 – 2010	Tate County School District Social Studies Teacher – Independence Middle School Report to Ms. Malinda White

Licensure:

2013 – Present	School Administrator (Entry Level) - State of Mississippi
2009 – Present	Teaching License (7-12 Social Studies) - State of Mississippi
2017 – Present	Out-of-State Principal’s License (applied for) - State of Louisiana

Non-Education Related Employment:

2016 - 2017	North Mississippi Herald; Water Valley, MS Freelance contributor Report to Mr. David Howell
2009	Boy & Girls Club of Northeast Louisiana; West Monroe, LA Site Coordinator - Monroe Area Report to Mr. Tom Morris
2008	Boys & Girls Club of Northeast Louisiana; West Monroe, LA Staff Member Report to Mr. Tom Morris
2006 - 2009	Louisiana High School Athletics Association Soccer Referee

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 2006 - 2007 | Parkview Baptist Church; Monroe, LA
Youth Associate
Report to Reverend Terry Barnes |
| 2004 - 2007 | Boys & Girls Club of El Dorado; El Dorado, AR
Summer Staff Member
Report to Mr. David Wetherington |

Publications:

Refereed Chapters in Books:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2017 | Geurin, J. Integrity in the face of adversity. In Griffiths, D. & Lowrey, S. (Eds.) <i>The principal reader: Narratives of experience</i> . Ontario, Canada. Word & Deed Publishing. |
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Higher-Ed Teaching Experience

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Spring 2017 | EDRS 673 - Data-Led Curriculum and Assessment
Teaching Assistant
Site facilitator for Grenada Campus (Distance learning)
- Facilitate engagement/instruction; presenting course material; assisting students with development of on-site research study for administrative internship experience |
| Fall 2016 | EDLD 674 - Leading Quality Instruction
Teaching Assistant
Site facilitator for Grenada Campus (Distance learning)
- Facilitate engagement/instruction; grading students' writing; presenting course material; assisting with overall student assessment |
| Fall 2016 | Assisted with oral comprehensive examinations for exiting M.Ed. and Ed.S. students |

Professional Organizations:

- | | |
|-------|---|
| MAPEL | Mississippi Association of Professors of Educ. Leadership
Graduate Student Membership |
|-------|---|

AERA	American Educational Research Association Graduate Student Membership
ASCD	Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development Graduate Student Membership

Research Projects:

2017	<i>Comprehensive review of the treatment of school leadership in the 50 ESSA state plans.</i> University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Role: Policy Associate for Mississippi
2016	<i>An investigation of superintendents in the state of Mississippi: Ethical leadership perspectives, school leader demographics, and school district characteristics.</i> Fowler & Hsu - The University of Mississippi Role: Research Assistant

Professional Development:

2016	MS Assoc. of Professors of Educational Leadership (MAPEL) Fall Conference - October 14, 2016 Jackson State University; Jackson, MS
2016	EDLD Faculty Meetings - Department of Leadership and Counselor Education The University of Mississippi; University, MS
2016	MS Assoc. of Professors of Educational Leadership (MAPEL) Inaugural Conference - March 2016 The University of Mississippi; University, MS

Service:

Service to the Department, School, or College:

2017	Member Selection Committee for Principal Corps Program
2016	Member Interview and Selection Committee for Ed.D. Hybrid Program
2016	Member Interview Committee for M.Ed./Ed.S. Final Oral Comprehensive Examinations

Research Areas/Interests

- K-12 Leadership - Role of school leader; school climate and culture; ethical leadership; school as a part of larger local community
- Education Policy - Accuracy and equity of accountability systems; impact of labeling school performance; impact on community
- School Leader Preparation - Licensure programs; standards-based preparation; internship experiences