



# TRUTHFUL EYES

A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS



## A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CALL TO ACTION

Data driven insights into what makes  
school districts successful.

*A report commissioned by the  
Children's Defense Fund-Southern Regional Office .*



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
Glossary of Accountability Terms .....	6
<i>About Hinds County: Urban/Suburban Gaps .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>Clinton, HCSD, and JPS School Districts.....</b>	<b>8</b>
District Profile .....	9
Community Profile.....	10
Family Profile .....	11
Key Findings.....	12
<i>About Madison County: Wealth and Poverty.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>Canton and Madison County School Districts.....</b>	<b>14</b>
District Profile .....	15
Community Profile .....	16
Family Profile.....	17
<i>About Rankin County: Growth and Expectation.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>Pearl and Rankin County School Districts .....</b>	<b>20</b>
District Profile .....	21
Community Profile.....	22
Family Profile .....	23
Key Findings.....	24
<i>About Lowndes County: The Golden Triangle: Regionalism in Action.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<b>Columbus and Lowndes County School Districts.....</b>	<b>26</b>
District Profile: .....	27
Community Profile.....	28
Family Profile .....	29
Key Findings: Close, but Far Apart.....	30
<i>About Washington County: Majority Black and Rural .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<b>Greenville and Western Line School Districts .....</b>	<b>32</b>
District Profile .....	33
Community Profile.....	34
Family Profile .....	35
Key Findings.....	36
<i>About Jackson County: Low and High Tides.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<b>Jackson County and Moss Point School Districts .....</b>	<b>38</b>
District Profile .....	39
Community Profile.....	40
Family Profile .....	41
Key Findings.....	42
<b>Where you Live Matters: Key Findings from Truthful Eyes: A Look at Mississippi Schools.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>The Big Picture .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Accountability.....	44
Graduation Rates .....	44
Income .....	45
Student Racial Gaps.....	46
Teaching and Leading.....	47
Parents Profiles .....	48
Broadband Access .....	49
College and Career Ready.....	50
Grade K Readiness .....	51
Conclusion.....	52
Let's Close The Gaps .....	54



# TRUTHFUL EYES

## A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

# INTRODUCTION

## DATA! DATA!! DATA!!!

**440,000**

Students

**140**

Public school  
districts

**31**

A districts

**35**

B districts

**35**

C districts

**42**

D or F districts

Mississippi has more than 440,000 students in 140 public school districts across the state.

For the 2018-2019 school year, the last time the Mississippi Department of Education graded school districts with letter grades, 31 districts were rated A, 35 were rated B — high-performing districts. Another 35 were rated C — successful. There were 42 districts rated D or F— low-performing districts. MDE included three charter schools in the total.

MDE's grading system considers several indicators, including how well students perform on state assessments, whether students are showing improvement 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. At the high school level, accountability measures include students' ACT scores and participation and achievement in advanced coursework.

Under MDE's performance rating, school districts can earn up to 1,000 points. The highest performing district was the Petal School District with a 754 score. The scores for low-performing districts ranged from a low 409 to a high of 535.

"Truthful Eyes: A Look at Mississippi Schools" takes an in-depth look at Mississippi's school districts, analyzing more

than 100 different data points from MDE's 2018-2019 assessments, U.S. Census, and other sources.

*The data is grouped in the following areas:*

- **Accountability:** MDE assessments and scores
- **District Profile:** MDE student enrollment, and number of teachers and schools
- **Teaching and Leading:** MDE teacher education and experience
- **Community Profile:** U.S. Census poverty, employment and homeownership rates
- **Family Profile:** U.S. Census and National Center for Educational Statistics, family poverty, parent education, and homeownership

*Truthful Eyes analyzed data to answer the following questions:*

- What impact does poverty have on district and student performance?
- What family and community variables impact student and district performance?
- What difference does teacher experience have on a district's performance?

The ultimate question is whether the state is preparing its students for the 21st Century? In an increasingly global economy will Mississippi students be prepared to compete with national and international students?



# TRUTHFUL EYES

## A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

# Executive Summary

## Districts: Who is successful and why? And is it enough?

**13**

School districts  
examined

**6**

Counties chosen as  
microcosm across state:

**HINDS**  
**MADISON**  
**RANKIN**  
**LOWNDES**  
**WASHINGTON**  
**JACKSON**

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Black districts**  
**Majority white districts**  
**Diverse districts**  
**Geographically dispersed districts**  
**across the state**

Mississippi's public schools are underfunded. Mississippi ranks 47th in the nation in per-pupil spending. Mississippi is losing population. Mississippi is one of only three states that lost population in the most recent census. Three of the six counties we analyzed lost population.

- The B district is Western Line.
- The C district is Hinds County.
- The four D districts are JPS, Canton, Columbus and Moss Point.
- The F district is Greenville.

See **SUMMARY**, next page



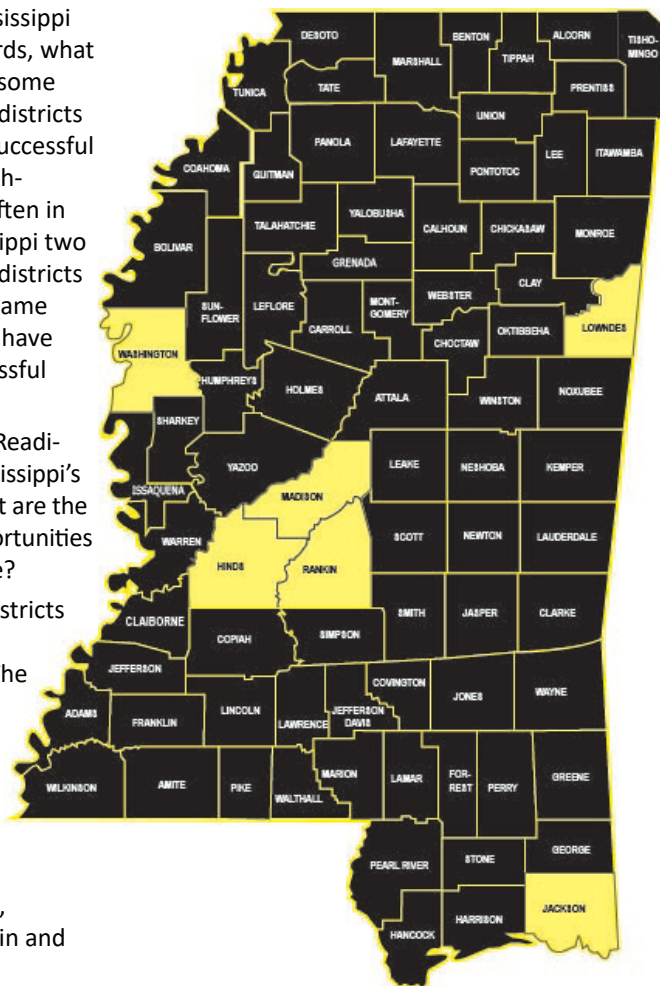
**Pamela Shaw**

When we use College and Career Readiness as the standard, how do Mississippi's districts compare nationally? What are the implications for employment opportunities and economic growth for the state?

This report examines 13 school districts in six counties as a microcosm of school districts across the state. The six counties are Hinds, Jackson, Lowndes, Madison, Rankin and Washington. The 13 districts were chosen for analysis because of their geographic diversity.

By Mississippi standards, what makes some school districts more successful than others? Often in Mississippi two school districts in the same county have districts where one is rated successful and the other rated failing.

- The six A districts are Clinton, Madison, Pearl, Lowndes, Rankin and Jackson County.



# TRUTHFUL EYES

## A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

### Summary: Key factors for success

Continued from previous page

The districts examined include all-Black districts, majority White districts, urban and rural districts. “Truthful Eyes: A Look at Mississippi Schools” shows what successful districts have in common and what failing districts have in common.

The data analyzed was pre-pandemic. There is widespread agreement that the pandemic unearthed and exacerbated education, economic and community inequities that had been simmering for generations. The poorest school districts and communities disproportionately felt the health and economic toll.

The findings beg the question: Are districts equipping students for the 21st Century economy? What factors outside the school environment inform district performance? What strategies are in place to mitigate these factors? Can counties sustain growth and recruit new business and industry with wide education and economic disparities within that county?

“Truthful Eyes” gives a snapshot of the counties in this report, followed by a comparison of school districts and the findings from data analyzed.

Some examples:

- In Hinds County, which has three school districts, the Clinton Public School District is the only A-rated district. More than 80 percent of its teachers are experienced. In the Hinds County School District and the Jackson Public Schools, 67 percent of their teachers have four-plus years of experience.
- In Madison County, which has two school districts, the Madison County School District is rated A. Canton Public

#### A DISTRICTS

Clinton  
Madison Co.  
Pearl  
Lowndes Co.  
Rankin Co.  
Jackson Co.

#### B DISTRICT

Western Line

#### C DISTRICT

Hinds Co.

#### D DISTRICTS

JPS  
Canton  
Columbus  
Moss Point

#### F DISTRICT

Greenville

School District is rated D. The median household income in the Madison County school district is \$60,000 more than the Canton district.

- In Rankin County, both the Pearl School District and the Rankin County School District have A ratings. There are more homeowners in the county district than in the Pearl municipal district. The median household income is almost \$20,000 more in the Rankin County School District.

- In Lowndes County, there are two school districts. Columbus Municipal School District is rated D. Lowndes County is rated A. Average household income is double in the Lowndes County district than the Columbus district.

- In Washington County, two of the four school districts were analyzed, Greenville Public School District rated F, and Western Line School District rated B. Families in Western Line earn about \$6,000 a year more in median household income than families in the Greenville district, although the GPSD has more families with four years of college.

- In Jackson County, we examine two of the four school districts. The Moss Point School District has a D rating. The Jackson County School District and the other districts have A ratings. Both districts have some comparable factors including homeownership, but the poverty level is 30.6 percent in the Moss Point School District compared to 16.6 percent in the Jackson County School District.

The following pages will offer a more in-depth comparison of these school districts. Again, the data analyzed was pre-pandemic.



# TRUTHFUL EYES

## A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

### Glossary of Accountability Terms: \*\*

1. **Reading (English) Proficiency** - Percent of students scoring Proficient or Advanced (Levels 4 or 5) on the statewide MAAP ELA or English II assessment.
2. **Reading (English) Growth** - Points awarded to students making adequate progress in performance on the statewide English assessment from one year to the next.
3. **Reading (English) Low Growth** - Points earned for growth for students in the lowest 25% of performance on the statewide English assessment.
4. **History Proficiency** - Percent of school students scoring Proficient or Advanced (Levels 3 or 4) on the statewide U.S. History assessment.
5. **Math Proficiency** - Percent of students scoring Proficient or Advanced (Levels 4 or 5) on the statewide MAAP math or Algebra I assessment.
6. **Math Growth** - Points awarded to students making adequate progress in performance on the statewide math assessment from one year to the next.
7. **Math Low Growth** - Points earned for growth of students in the lowest 25% of performance on the statewide math assessment.
8. **Science Proficiency** - Percent of students scoring Proficient or Advanced (Levels 4 or 5) on the statewide Science or Biology I assessment.
9. **Acceleration** - The number of points earned for a combination of student participation and performance in accelerated courses (Advanced Placement, Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge and Industry Certification).
10. **College & Career Readiness** - Percentage of high school students who met the ACT benchmarks for English (18) or reading (22) and for math (22).
11. **Graduation Rate** - Percentage of students who graduated within four years.
12. **\*18-19 Experienced Teachers** - Percentage of teachers with four or more years of teaching experience.
13. **\* 18-19 In-Field Teachers** - The percentage of teachers with a valid certificate and teaching a course for which they are properly endorsed.
14. **\* 18-19 Provisional Teachers** - Percent of teachers that hold an emergency or provisional license, a valid license to teach in Mississippi.

\* 2018-2019 School year

\*\* As defined by MDE

# TRUTHFUL EYES

A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## ABOUT MADISON COUNTY

CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI

### Population

95,203

### African Americans

38.2 Percent

### White

57 Percent

### Hispanic/Latino

2.95 Percent

### Asians

0.17 Percent

### Per Capita Income

\$38,901

## Wealth and Poverty

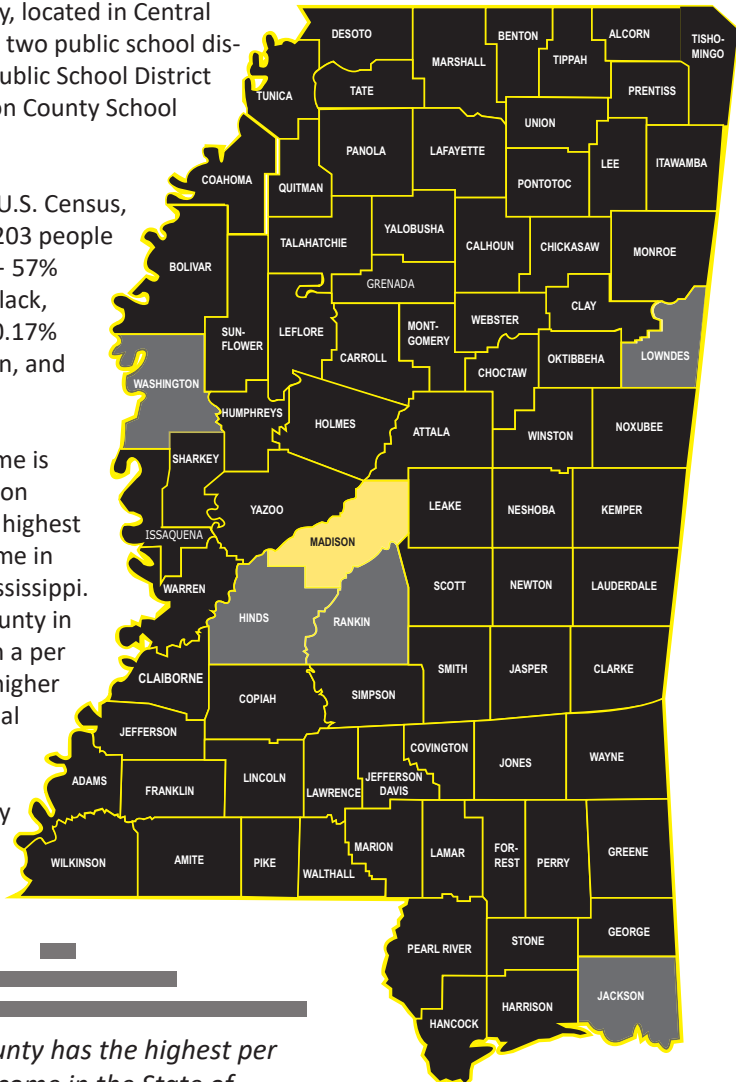
Madison County, located in Central Mississippi, has two public school districts: Canton Public School District and the Madison County School District.

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 95,203 people in the county — 57% White, 38.2% Black, 02.14% Asian, 0.17% Native American, and 2.95% Latino.

Per capita income is \$38,901. Madison County has the highest per capita income in the State of Mississippi. It is the only county in Mississippi with a per capita income higher than the national average.

Madison County had a population change of 11.85% since 2010.

*Madison County has the highest per capita income in the State of Mississippi*



**Major Employers:** Nissan Automotive Manufacturing | Kasai Automotive Interior Trim Components | Yazaki North America Automotive Power and Data Solutions | Bayer Seed Research and Development | Eaton Hydraulic Pumps.



# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS MADISON COUNTY



## BY THE NUMBERS

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Canton 533 D

Madison Co. 726 A

### ACT SCORES

Canton 13.70

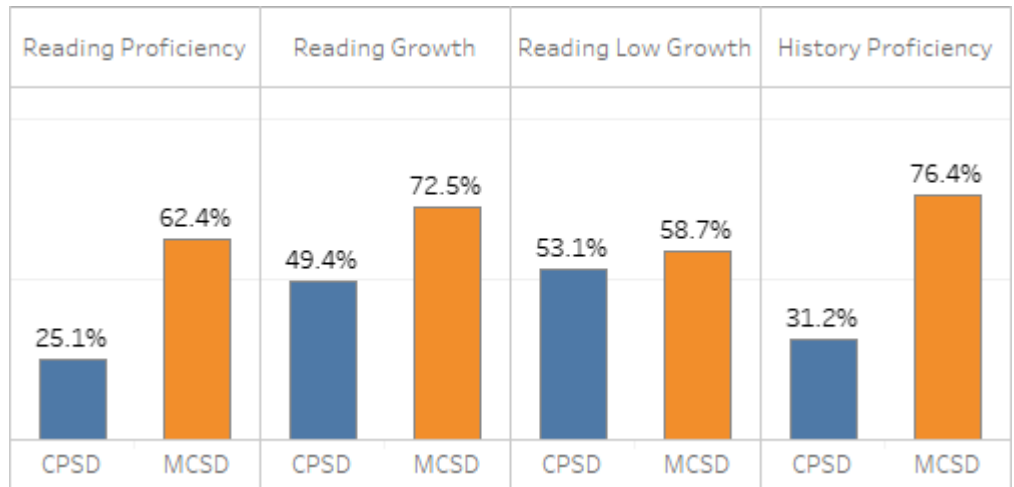
Madison Co. 20.00

### FINDINGS

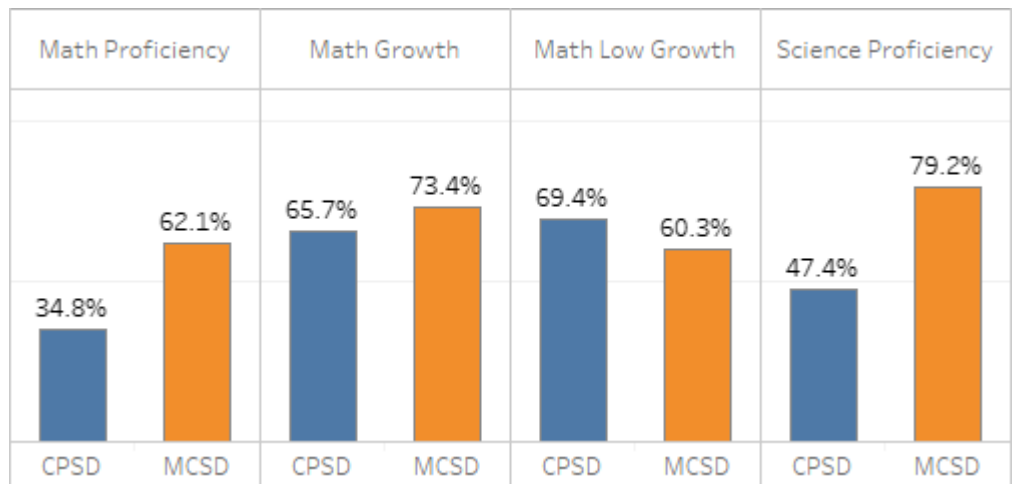
Madison County students outperformed Canton students by 37% in reading proficiency, and by 45% in history proficiency.

58% of Madison County graduates were college and career ready compared to 16% of Canton graduates.

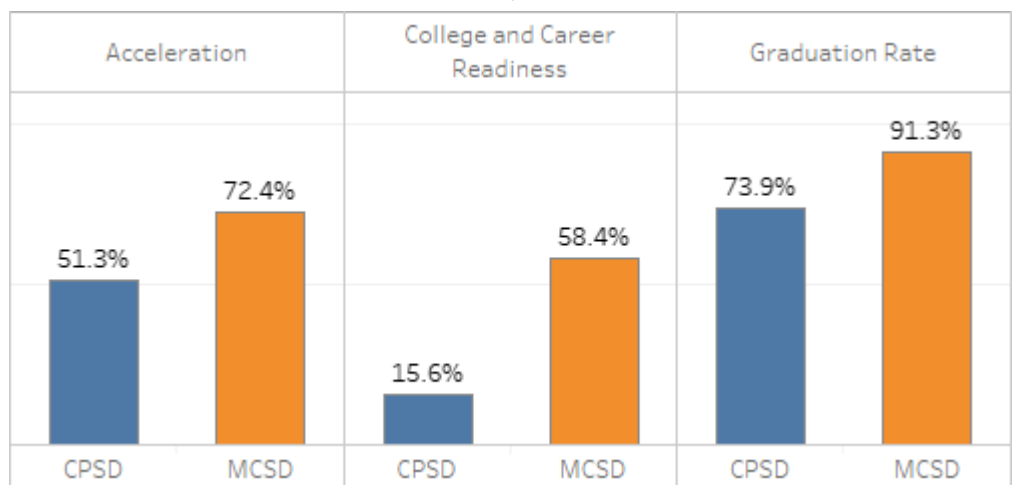
## ASSESSMENTS: READING AND HISTORY



## ASSESSMENTS: MATH AND SCIENCE



## ASSESSMENTS: GRADUATION





# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS MADISON COUNTY



## BY THE NUMBERS

### DISTRICT PROFILES

Schools  
Enrollment : Teachers

**Canton** 3,391 9 199

**Madison** 13,302 23 900

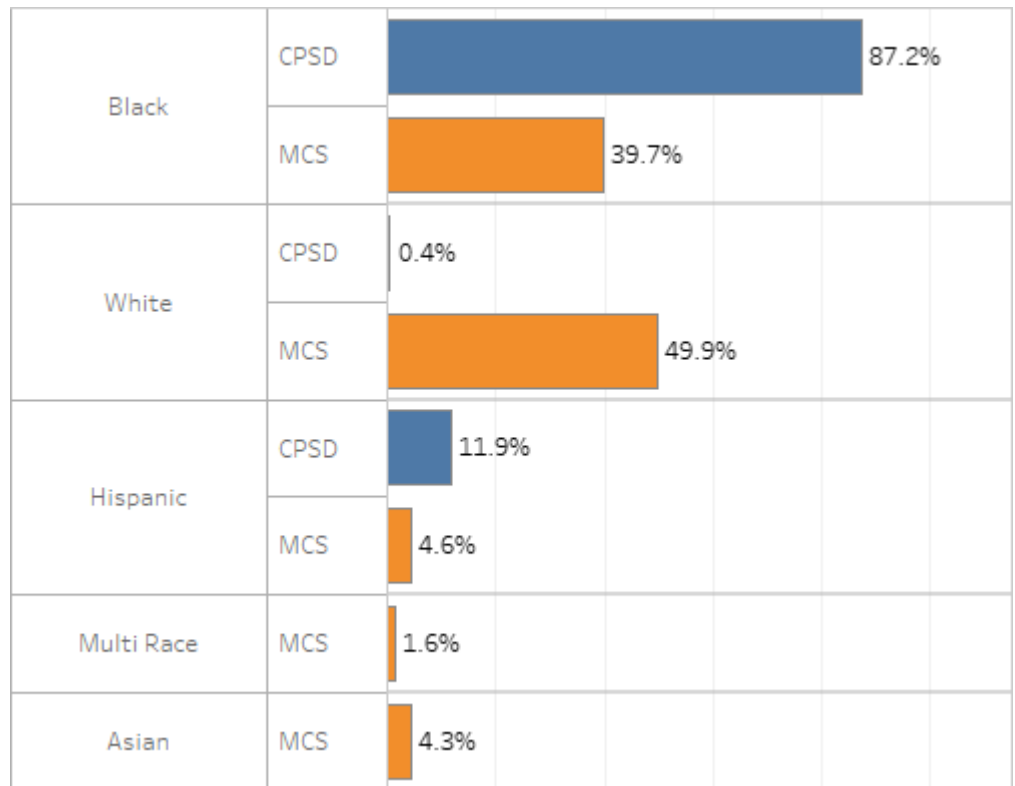
### CANTON:

Black: 87% White: 0.4%

### MADISON COUNTY:

Black: 40% White: 50%

## STUDENTS: RACE



\* Represents suppressed data to prevent the identification of individuals in small cells or with unique characteristics.

## TEACHING AND LEADING

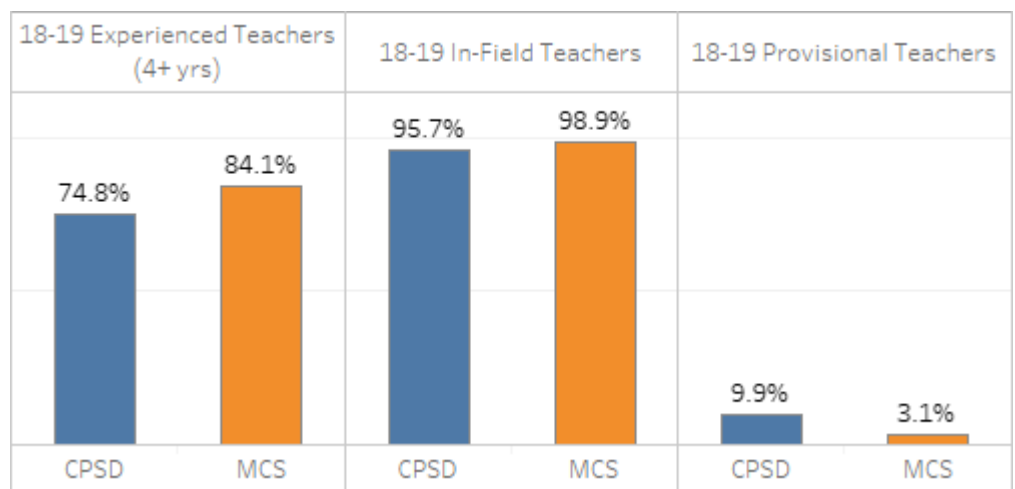
Teachers

**Canton** 199

**Madison Co.** 900

## FINDINGS

## TEACHERS: EXPERIENCE



84% of the teachers in Madison County are experienced and 75% in Canton.

10% of the teachers in Canton are provisional and 3% in Madison County.

# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS MADISON COUNTY



## BY THE NUMBERS

### COMMUNITY PROFILES

Median  
Household  
Income

Canton \$30,287

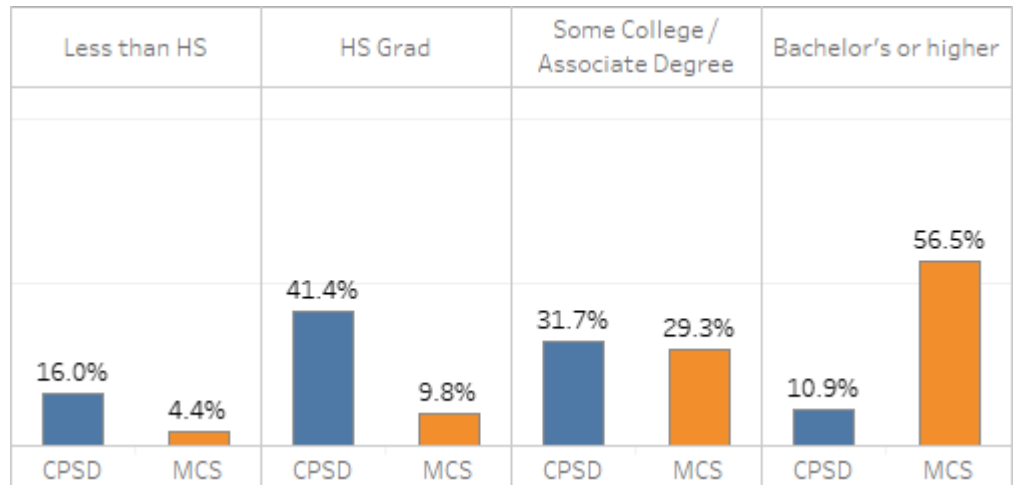
Madison Co. \$90,538

### FINDINGS

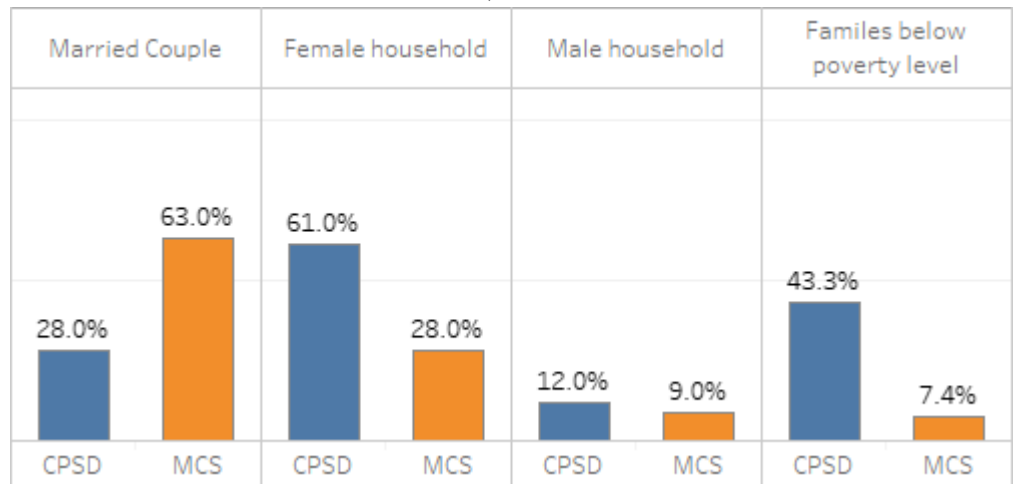
43% of families are below the poverty level in Canton compared to 7% in Madison County.

74% of Madison County parents are homeowners compared to 35% of Canton's.

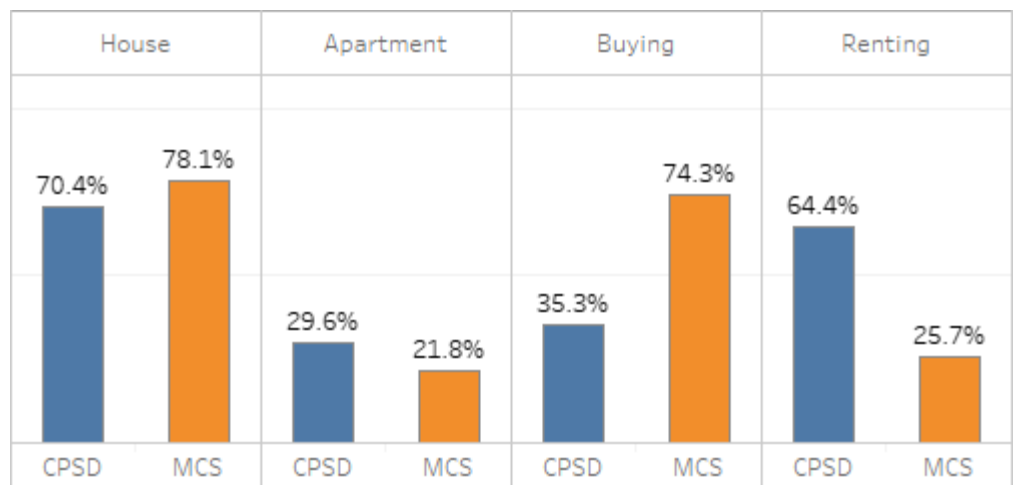
### PARENTS: EDUCATION



### PARENTS: HOUSEHOLD STATUS



### PARENTS: HOME OWNERSHIP



# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS MADISON COUNTY

## BY THE NUMBERS

### FAMILY PROFILES

Median  
Household  
Income

Canton \$30,287

Madison Co. \$90,538

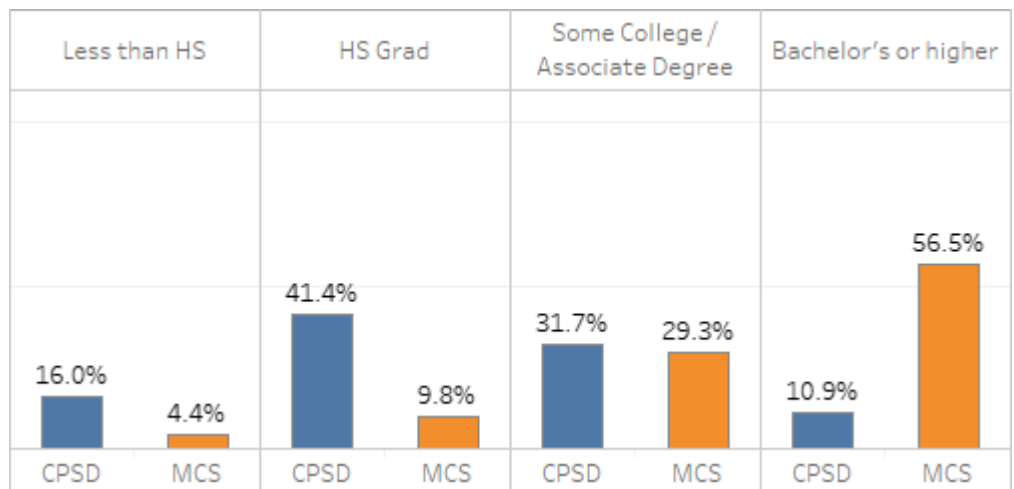
### FINDINGS

57% of Madison County parents have bachelor's degrees or higher compared to 11% in Canton.

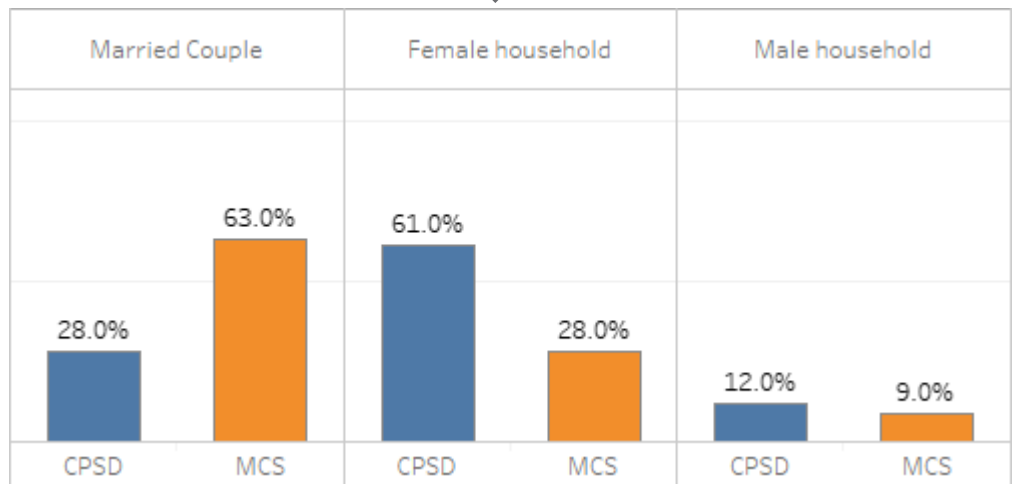
90% of Madison County parents are in the workforce compared to 88% of Canton's.

The median household income in Madison County is \$90,538 compared to \$30,287 in Canton, a more than \$60,000 difference.

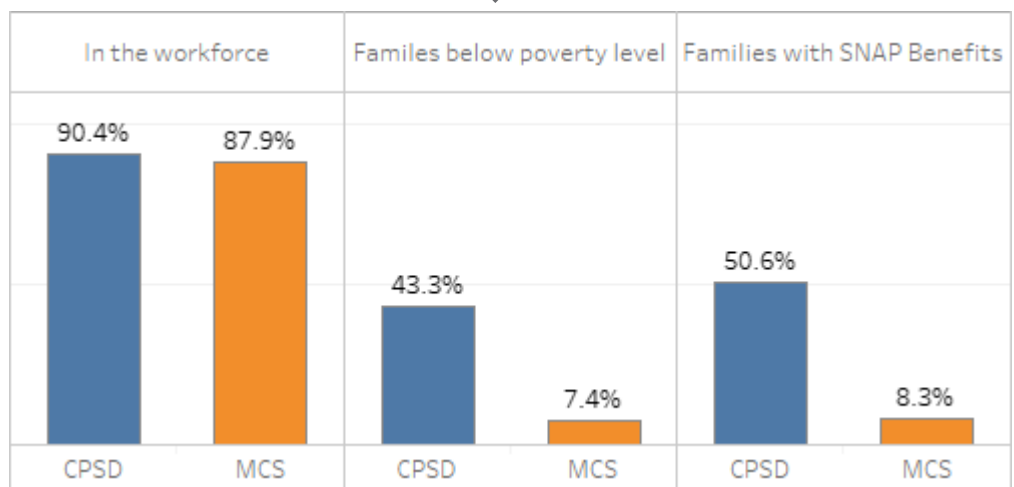
### PARENTS: EDUCATION



### FAMILY: HOUSEHOLD STATUS



### FAMILY: EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY



# Key Findings



## Money matters

The median household income in the Madison County School District is \$60,000 more than the median household income in the Canton district. Only 7.4% of Madison County School District households live below the poverty level compared to 43.3% living below the poverty level in the Canton School District.

Canton Public School District, located in northern Madison County, is 87% Black and 11.88% Hispanic. The Madison County School District is roughly 50% White and 36.77% Black, 4.57% Hispanic and 4.25% Asian.

Economically, all standards were much higher for families in the Madison County School District including the wide gap in household income.

### FINDINGS

The family poverty level is seven times greater in Canton than in Madison County, 43% versus 7%.

56% of Madison County's parents have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 11% of Canton's parents.

90% of Madison County and 88% of Canton parents are in the workforce.

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

**CANTON**

\$30,287

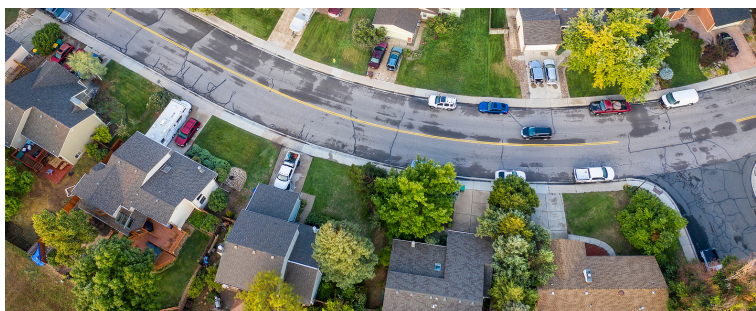
**MADISON COUNTY**

\$90,538



# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE



## Where you Live Matters

Where one lives within a county may determine whether one attends a successful or unsuccessful school. Analyzing data from this report reveals common threads in A- and B-rated districts and D- and F- rated districts. Reminder: The geographic areas referenced are school districts.

### KEY FINDINGS from Truthful Eyes: A Look at Mississippi Schools

#### ACCOUNTABILITY (SEE CHART 1)

- In A-rated districts, Clinton had the highest score of 729 on MDE's 1,000 point scale.
- In D/F- rated districts, Greenville had the lowest score of 480 on MDE's 1,000 point scale.

#### GRADUATION RATE (SEE CHART 2)

- In A-rated districts, the highest graduation rate is 94% in Pearl. The lowest is 88% in Clinton.
- In D/F-rated districts, the highest graduation rate is 80% in Columbus. The lowest is 71% in Greenville.

#### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SEE CHART 3)

- In A-rated districts, the lowest median household income is \$60,448 in Pearl. The highest is \$90,538 in Madison. The median household income for the state is \$44,717.
- In D/F-rated districts, the lowest median household income is \$26,448 in Greenville; the highest is Moss Point at \$48,421.

#### FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY (SEE CHART 4)

- In A-rated districts, Lowndes County at 24% has the highest percentage of families below poverty rate. Madison and Rankin County districts have the smallest percentage of families below poverty at 7%. In the B-rated Western Line district, 44% of families are below the poverty line.
- In D/F rated districts, Greenville has the largest percentage of families below the poverty line at 48% and the smallest percentage of families below the poverty line is 31% in Moss Point.

#### STUDENT RACIAL GAP (SEE CHARTS 5 AND 6)

- There is only one majority Black A-rated district, Clinton at 54%. Western Line, a B-rated district is 59% Black. Hinds County, a C-rated district is 85% Black.
- The majority-white A-rated districts range from a high of 80% in Lowndes County to a low of 50% in Madison County.
- The majority-black D/F-rated districts range from a high of 99% in Greenville to low of 74% in Moss Point.

#### TEACHING: EXPERIENCED TEACHERS (SEE CHART 7)

- In every A- rated district except Rankin County, at least 80% of the teachers are experienced. Jackson County has the highest

percentage of experienced teachers with 88% and Rankin County the lowest with 77%. In Western Line, a B-rated district 89% of the teachers are experienced.

- In C-rated Hinds and D-rated JPS 67% of the teachers are experienced.
- In the D/F-rated districts the percentage of experienced teachers range from a high of 79% in Moss Point to a low of 67% in JPS.

#### TEACHING: PROVISIONAL TEACHERS (SEE CHART 8)

- No more than 3% of the teachers are provisional in A districts. The fewest is .05% in Jackson County and the most is 3% in Madison County. In B-rated Western Line 5% of the teachers are provisional.
- In D/F-rated districts, JPS and Greenville 22% of the teachers are provisional. Columbus had the fewest provisional teachers, 5%.

#### PARENT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (SEE CHART 9)

- In D/F-rated districts, the percentage of parents with a bachelor's degree or higher range from the high of 20% in JPS to the low of 11% in Canton.
- Parents with bachelor's degrees or higher in A rated districts range from a low of 16% in Pearl to a high of 57% in Madison. In B-rated Western Line, 6% of parents have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- In C-rated Hinds County 41% of parents have a bachelor's degree or higher, more than the A-rated districts, Jackson County (23%), Lowndes (28%), Pearl (16%) and Rankin (32%).

#### BUYING: (SEE CHART 10)

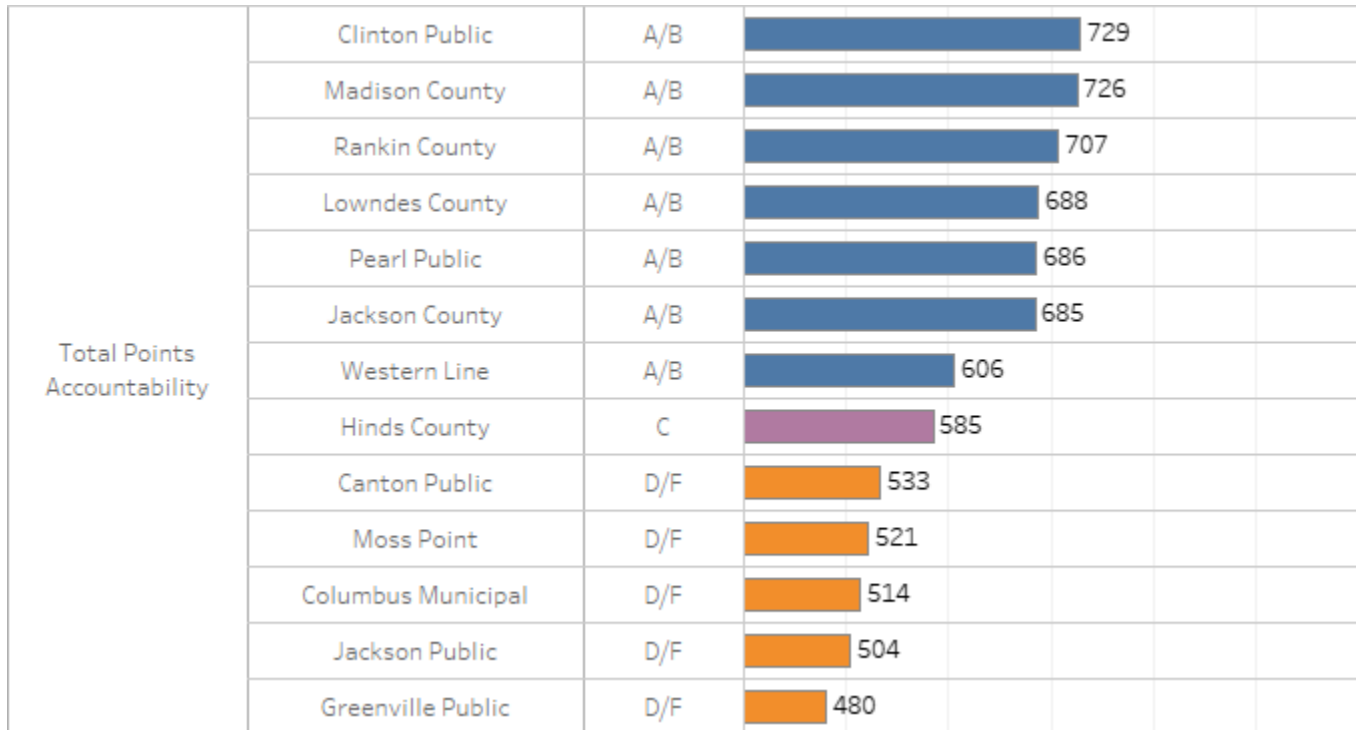
- Every A-rated district has at least 50% homeownership. The highest is Jackson County at 78% and the lowest is Pearl at 50%.
- Moss Point, a D-rated district, has a homeownership rate of 71%, a rate higher than Clinton, Pearl and Lowndes, all A-rated districts.
- With the exception of Moss Point, in D- and F-rated districts, the homeownership ranges from a high of 37% in JPS to a low of 28% in Columbus.

# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS THE BIG PICTURE



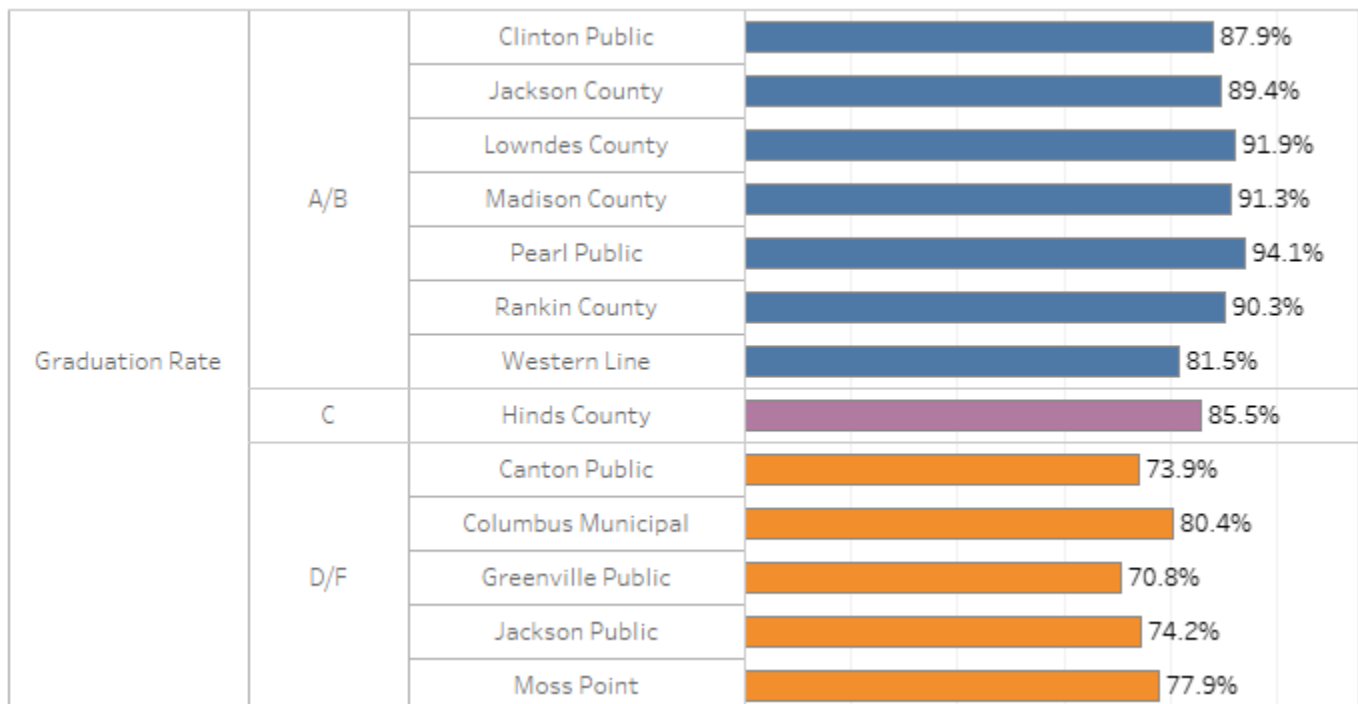
## 1. ACCOUNTABILITY

How MDE grades districts



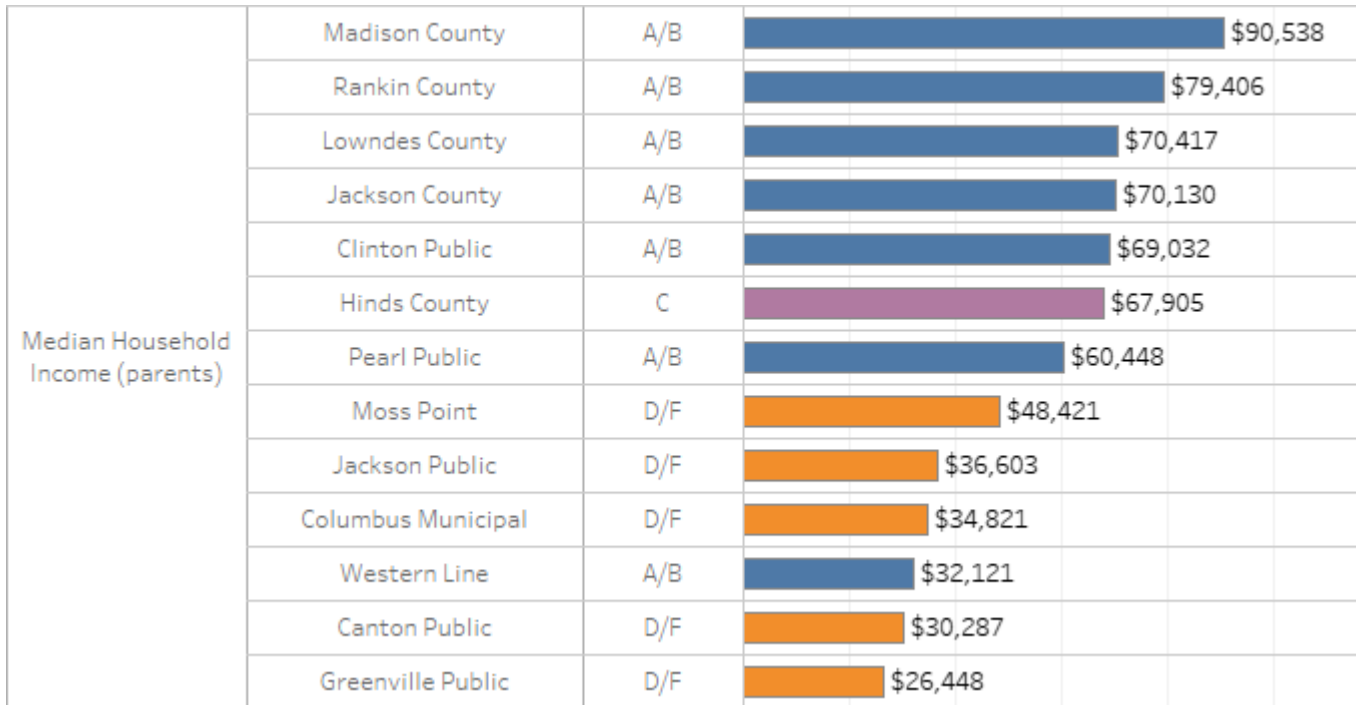
## 2. GRADUATION RATES

State improves, D/F Districts Still Lag



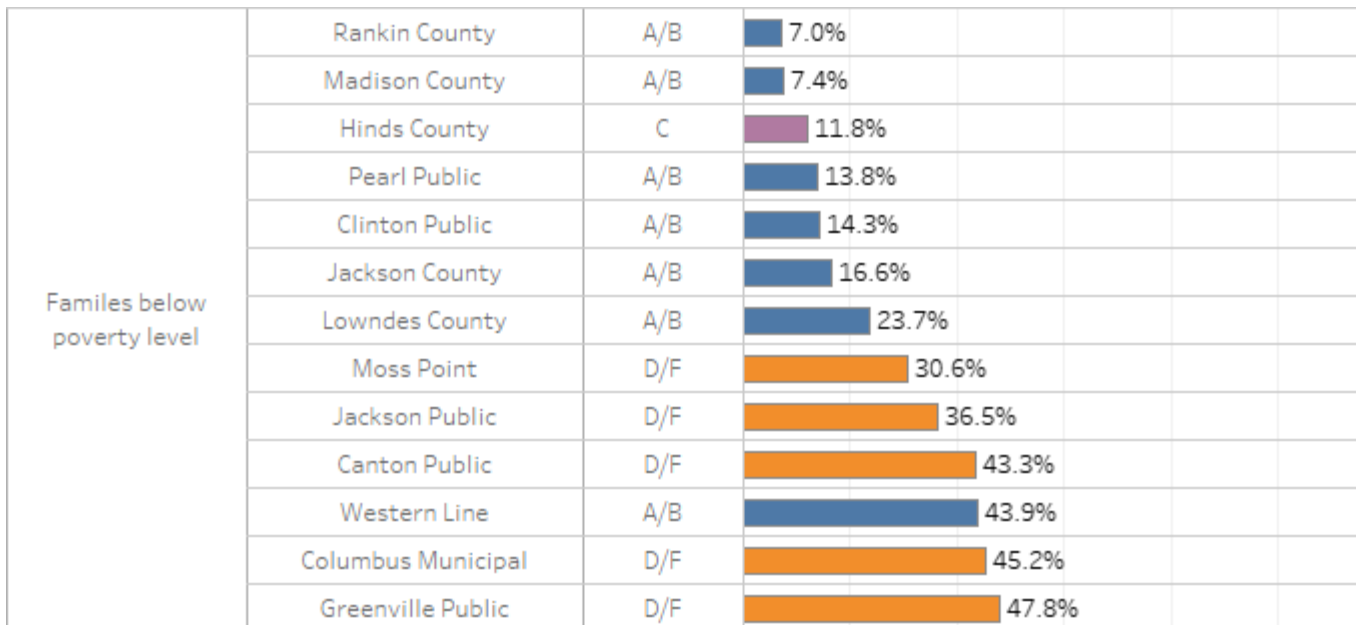
### 3. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The wealth gap



### 4. FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY

Poverty impacts performance

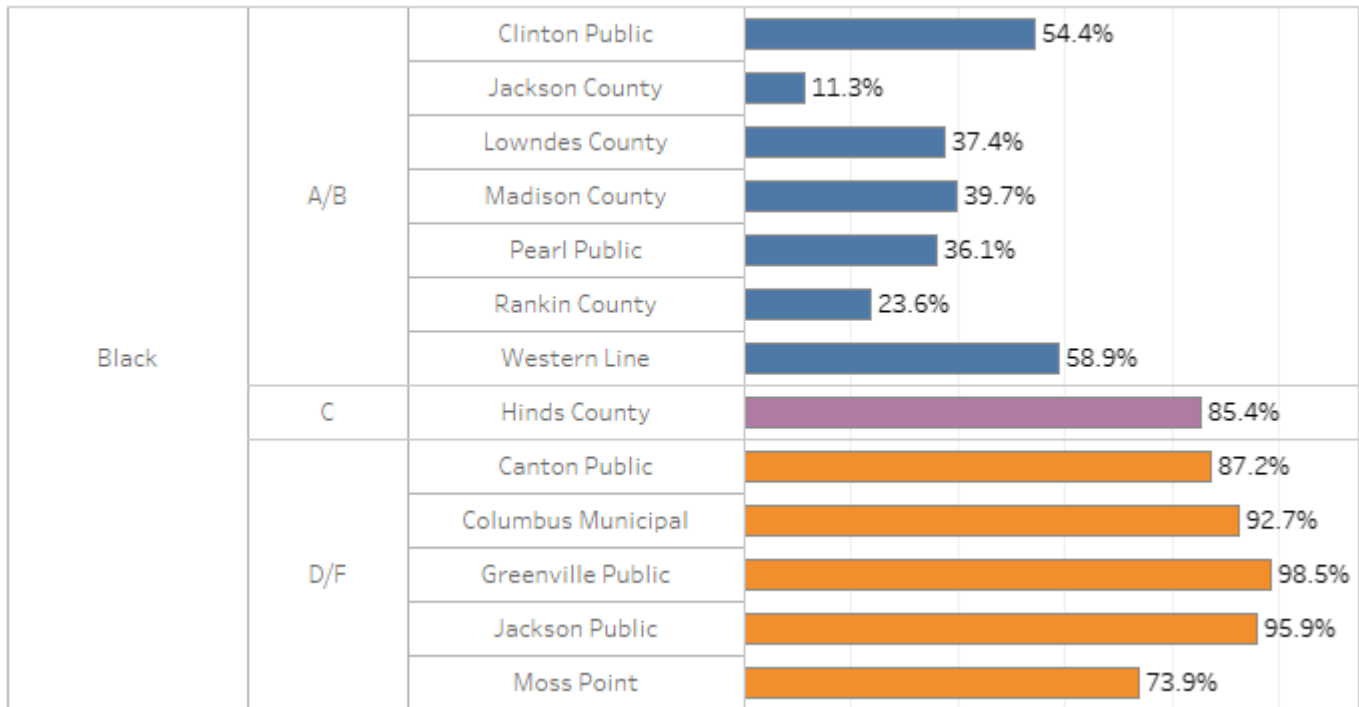


# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE

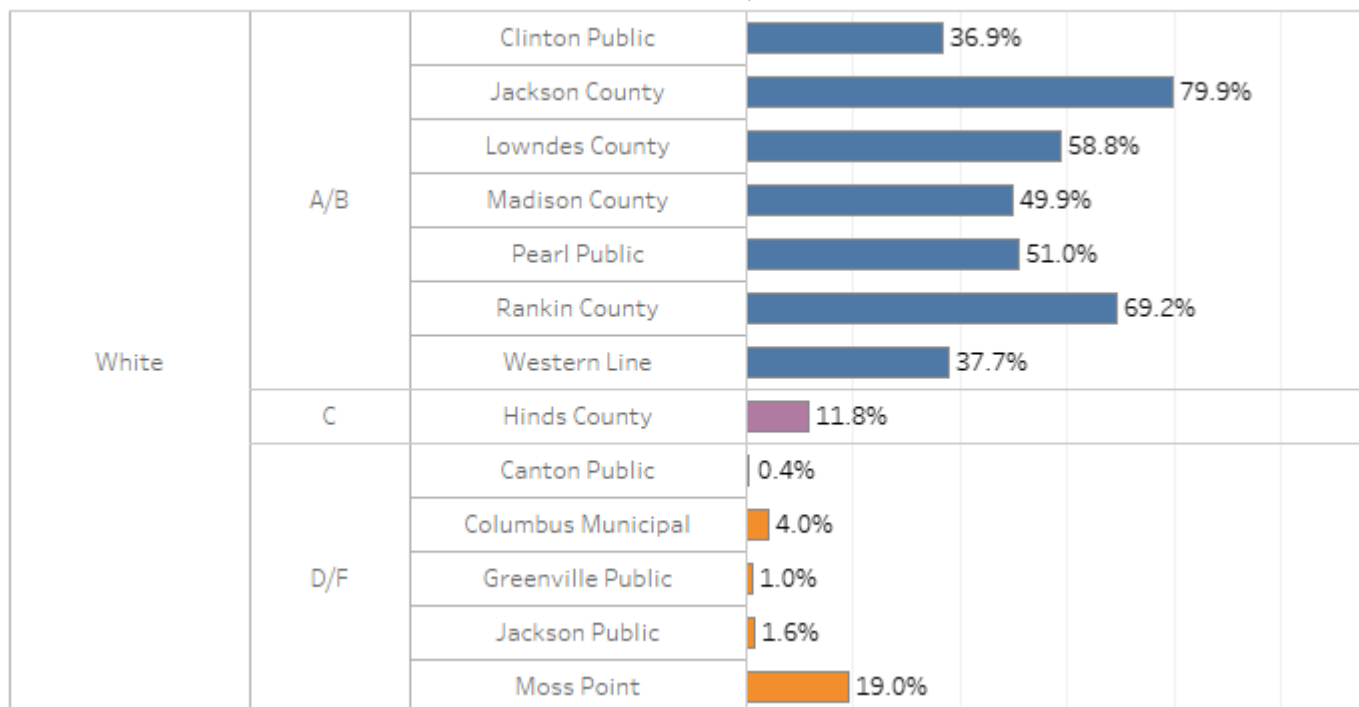
### 5. BLACK

Student Racial Gap - Black



### 6. WHITE

Student Racial Gap - White



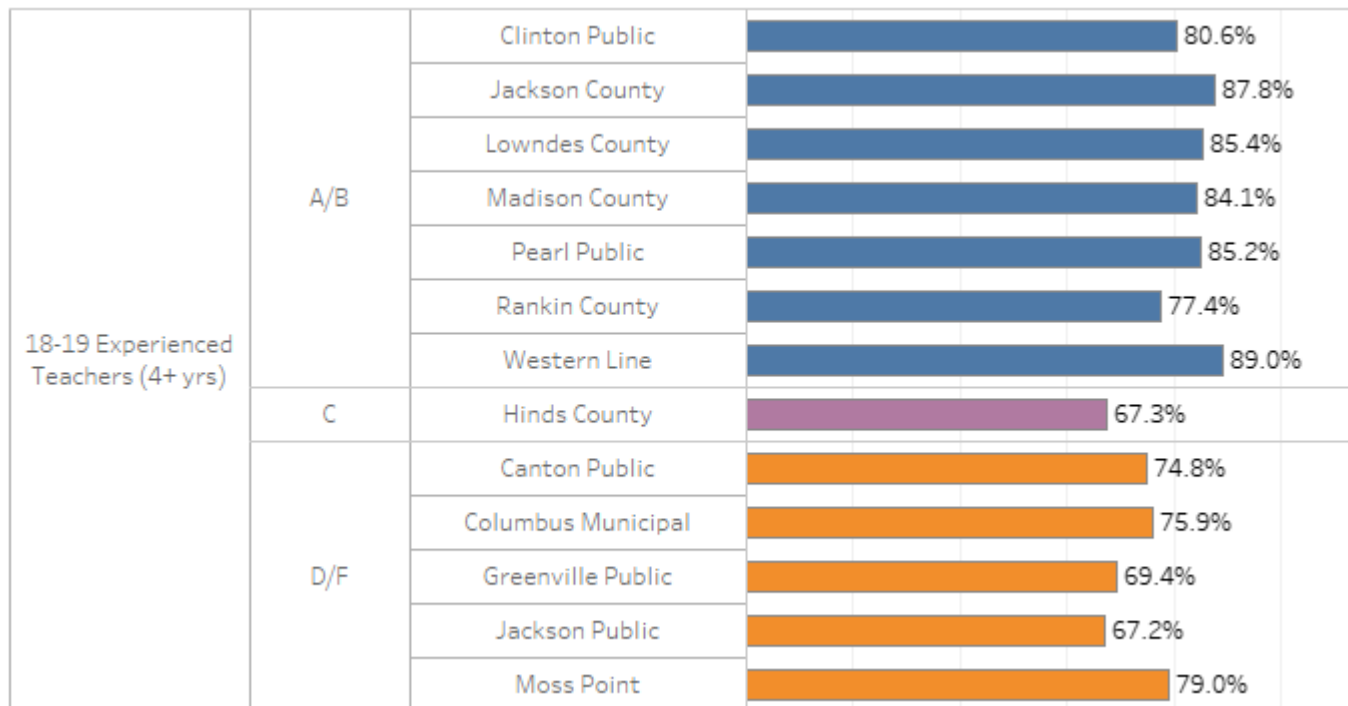


# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE

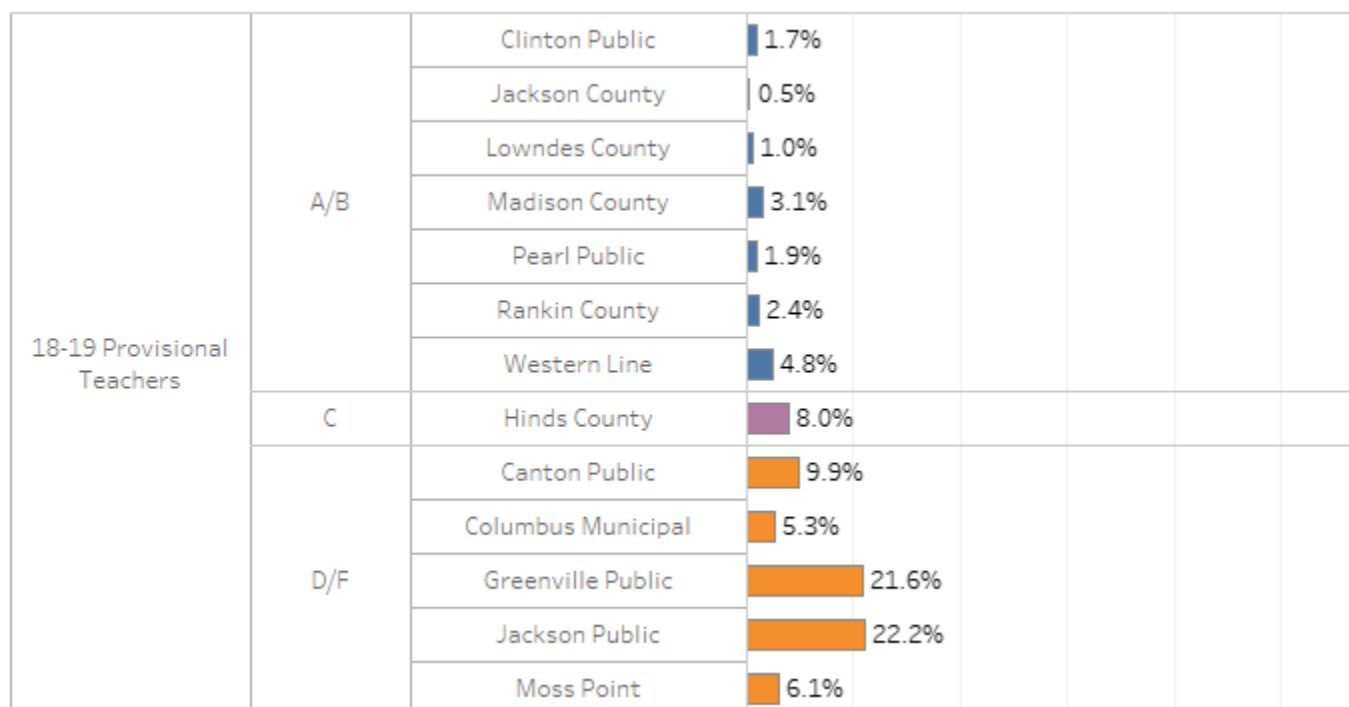
### 7. 18-19 EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

Teachers with 4+ years experience do better



### 8. PROVISIONAL TEACHERS

Certification matters

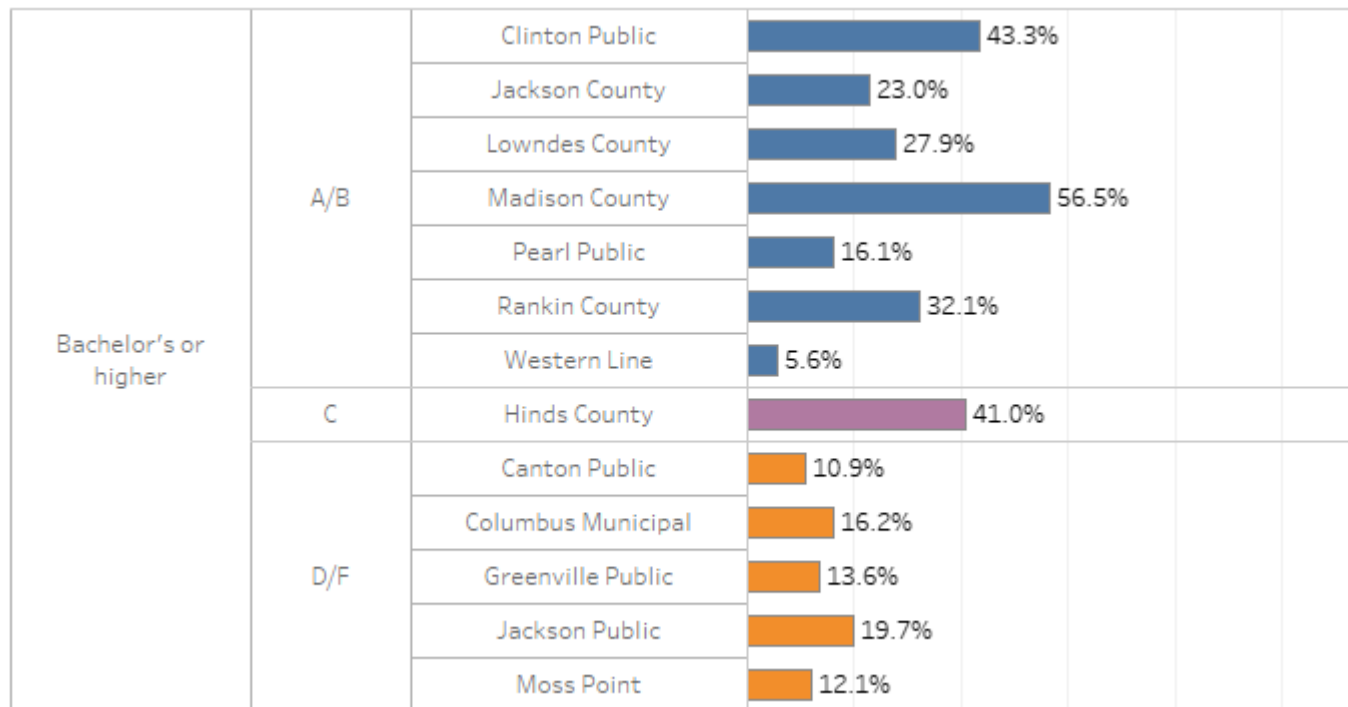


# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE

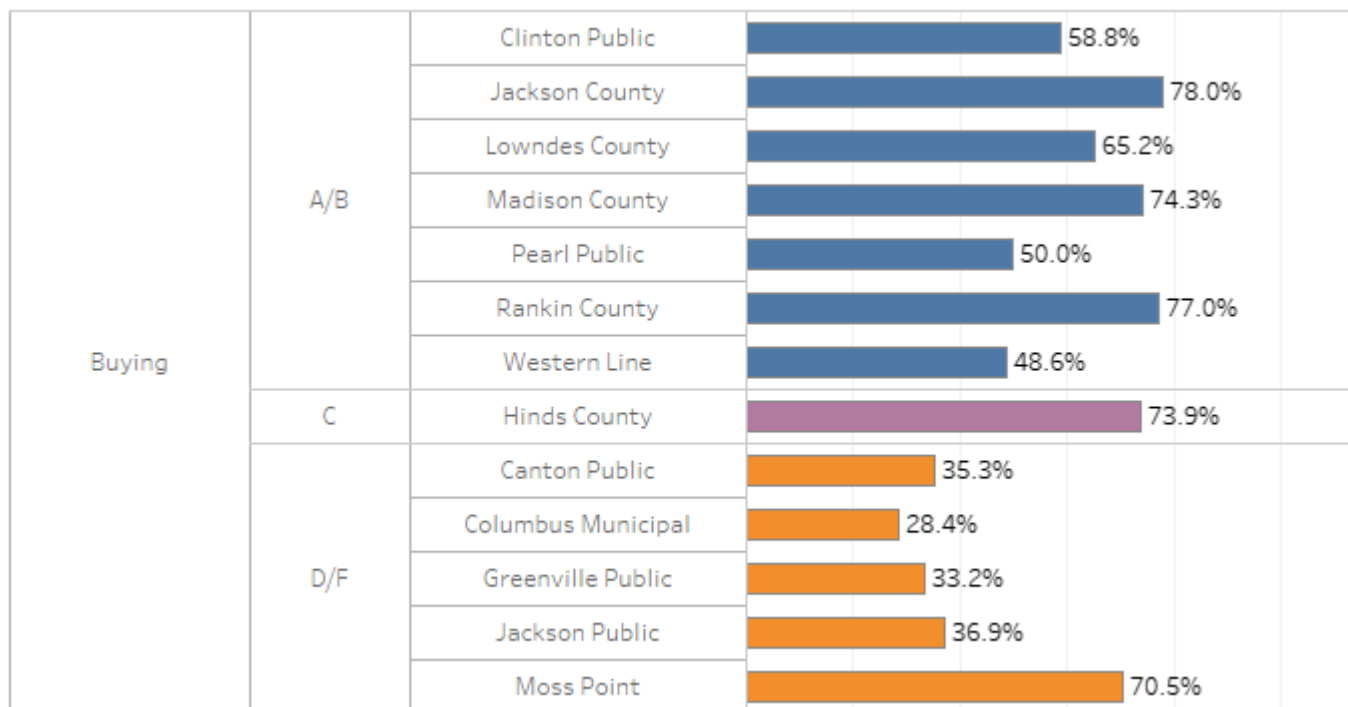
### 9. BACHELOR'S OR HIGHER

Parents' education impacts children



### 10. BUYING

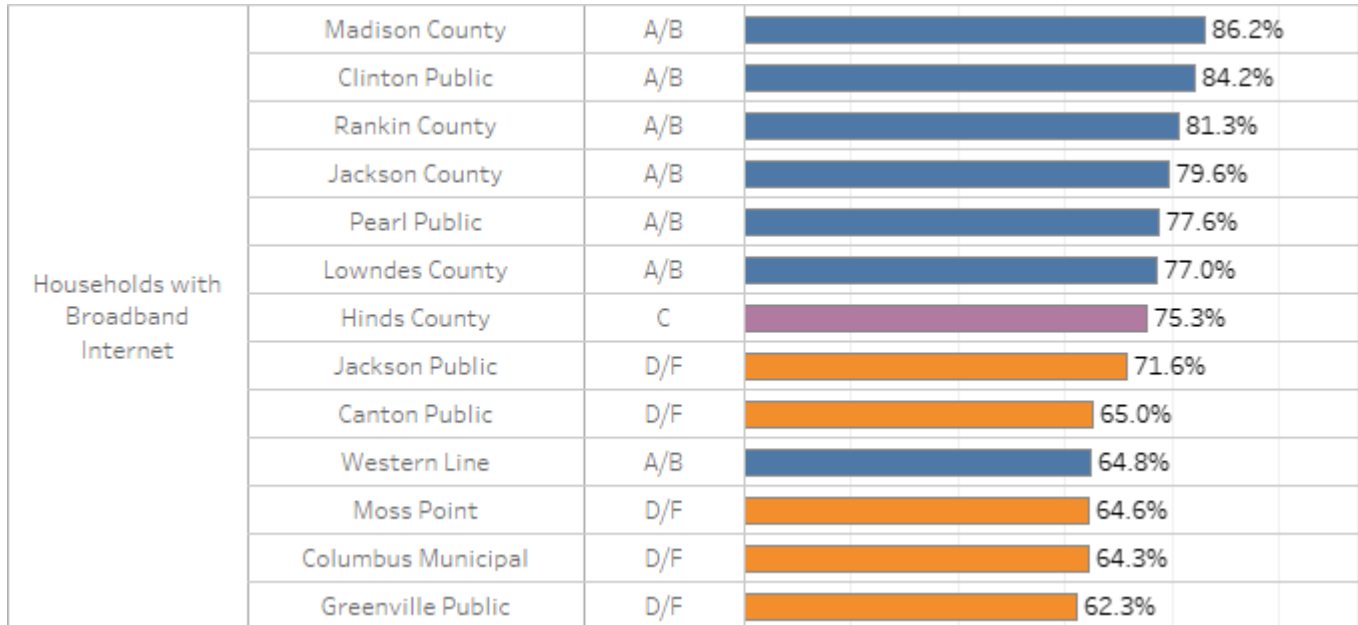
Homeownership: More than generational wealth building



# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS THE BIG PICTURE

## BROADBAND ACCESS

Digital divide



Most Truthful Eyes data from the Mississippi Department of Education were pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

The full impact of the pandemic on education in Mississippi and across the nation is unknown at this time. The pandemic led to school districts closing temporarily, shifting to virtual learning or a hybrid model. Also, some parents opted for homeschooling or keeping their children home, period.

Switching from in-person to remote learning presented problems for some school districts across the state with broadband access limited to certain areas, and even with the availability of computers and broadband, some low-income households don't have home internet service. The lack of broadband internet has left many rural areas of the state on the wrong side of the digital divide, and, consequently, some students may be negatively impacted.

Truthful Eyes data show there is a correlation between households with broadband access and the success of a school district. On average, less than two-third of households in low-performing districts had broadband access compared to more than three-fourth in successful districts having broadband access. As examples, the F-rated Greenville districts had 62.3% of its households with broadband access, while the A-rated Madison County district had 86.2% of its households with broadband access. (See chart)

## BROADBAND ACCESS

**GREENVILLE**

(F-RATED)

62.3%

**MADISON COUNTY**

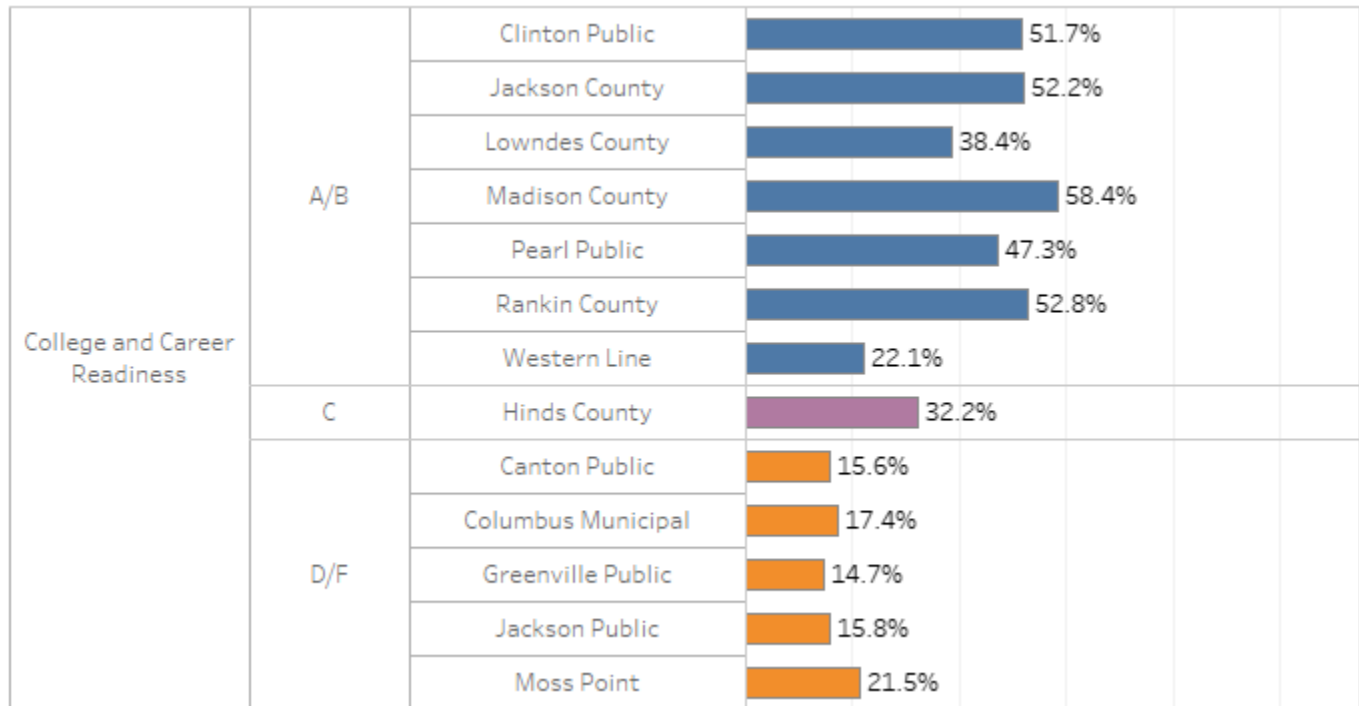
(A-RATED)

86.2%

# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS THE BIG PICTURE

## COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

Key indicator of success



A goal of education is to equip students with the skills needed to be successful in life. That success may or may not be a post secondary education. The ACT is a benchmark in determining if students are College and Career Ready. \*The ACT College and Career Readiness Standards are the backbone of ACT assessments. They describe essential skills and knowledge students need to become ready for college and career, giving clear meaning to test scores and serving as a link between what students have learned and what they are ready to learn next.

In Mississippi, College and Career Ready is defined by the percentage of high school students who met the ACT benchmarks for English (18) or reading (22) and for math (22). In 2019, Mississippi's composite score was 18.4. Nationally, the score was 20.7. Mississippi was ranked 13th of the 15 states with an ACT participation rate of 100%.

In D- and F- rated districts, Greenville at 15% had the lowest percentage of graduates to meet the standard and Moss Point at 22% was the highest to meet the standard of College and Career Ready.

In A and B rated-districts, at 38% Lowndes had the lowest percentage of graduates who were College and Career Ready. Madison's 58% was the highest.

## COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

**GREENVILLE**

(F-RATED)

14.7%

**MADISON COUNTY**

(A-RATED)

58.4%

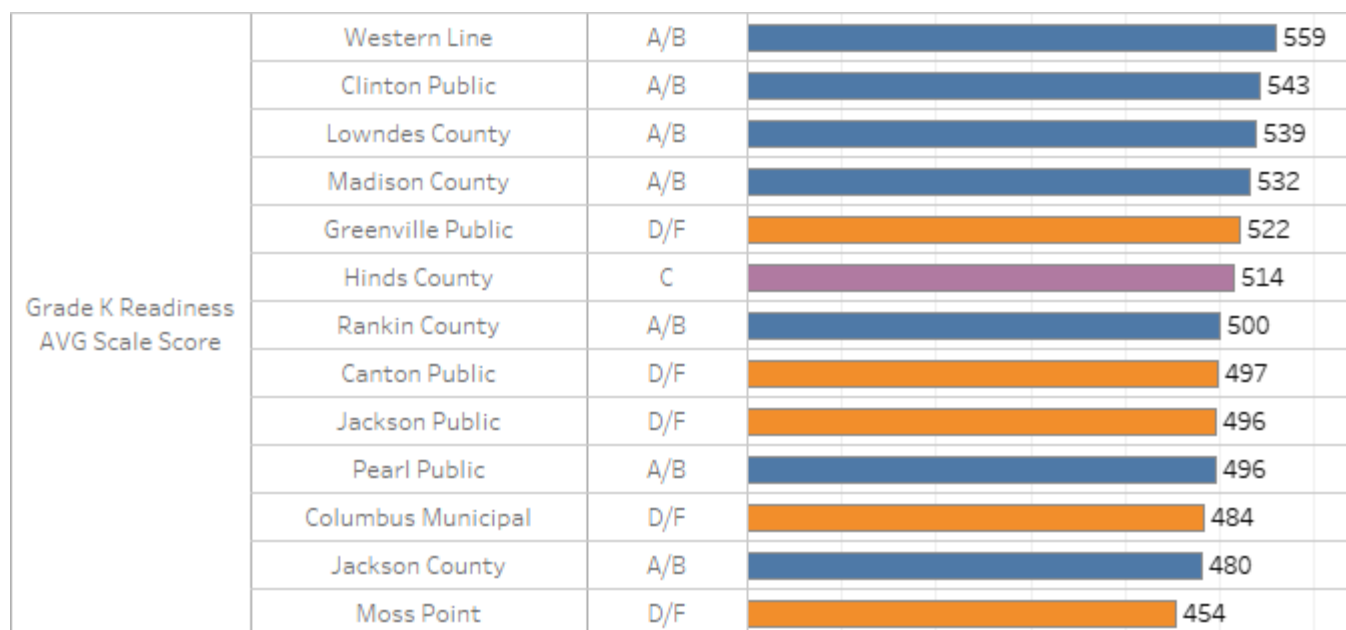


# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE

### GRADE K READINESS

The beginning: A Strong Foundation



Pre-K and kindergarten is foundational to college and career readiness. Increasingly, birth to 3 years programs are asked to do more than provide work support for families. Only 50% of 3 and 4 years old have access to early childhood education in child care and HeadStart centers and public school programs.

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment provides parents, teachers and early childhood providers with a common understanding of what children know and are able to do upon entering school. The primary purpose of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is to improve the quality of classroom instruction and other services provided to students from birth to 3rd grade.

B-rated Western Line has the highest average scale score on the Kindergarten Readiness assessment at 559. D-rated Moss Point's 455 was the lowest average scale score on the kindergarten readiness assessment.

### KINDERGARTEN READINESS

**WESTERN LINE**

(B-RATED)

559

**MOSS POINT**

(D-RATED)

454

# CONCLUSION

In each county and district analyzed in this report there are questions that could be asked:

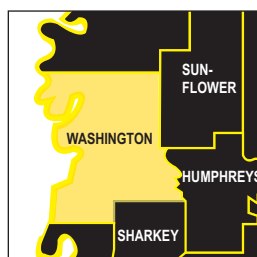
The household income, parent education and homeownership rates in **Hinds County** and **Clinton** are comparable, yet Clinton significantly outperforms Hinds with an A rating. What variables outside of these factors contribute to Hinds County's rating? How can those variables be overcome? JPS the largest district in Hinds County and the largest urban district in the state is D-rated. JPS suffers from many of the ills of older urban districts across the country. What strategies, practices and policies can be implemented to address the unique needs of urban poor students in a predominately rural state?



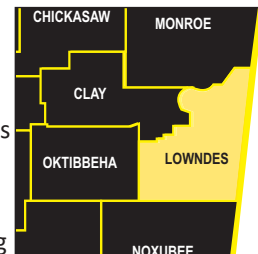
There is a huge economic divide between the **Madison County** and Canton school districts, which is reflective in the district performance as well. With such economic disparity within one county, would it be beneficial to the students in the Canton School District if the district and Madison consolidated?



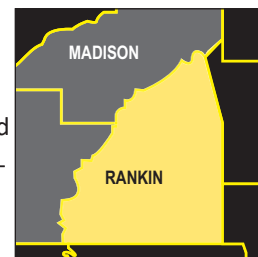
In rural, majority African American, under-resourced counties like **Washington County**, what community resources in addition to state funding and academic programs must be in place to improve other factors that impact district performance?



**Lowndes County** has benefited from a strong regional economic development approach, yet wide disparities exist between the Lowndes County and Columbus districts economically, impacting performance. How can this effective regional economic development approach help ensure that the poorest communities and districts are not left behind?



What lessons can be learned from Pearl in **Rankin County**, which performs despite indicators that normally would impact performance negatively? Pearl's parents' education, median family income and homeownership rate is at least 25% less than Rankin County, but Pearl is also an A district. How does Pearl excel and match the academic achievement of its sister county district despite disparities that normally impact other districts negatively?



In **Jackson County**, why is the D-rated Moss Point School District not performing better since 79% of its teachers are experienced, and the district has a homeownership rate of 71% and a median income above the state average?



Overall, what strategies can go across district lines to close gaps with neighboring districts within the same county or geographic proximity, where arbitrary district lines may determine opportunities for children within the same county?

See **CONCLUSION**, next page

# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## THE BIG PICTURE



Continued from previous page

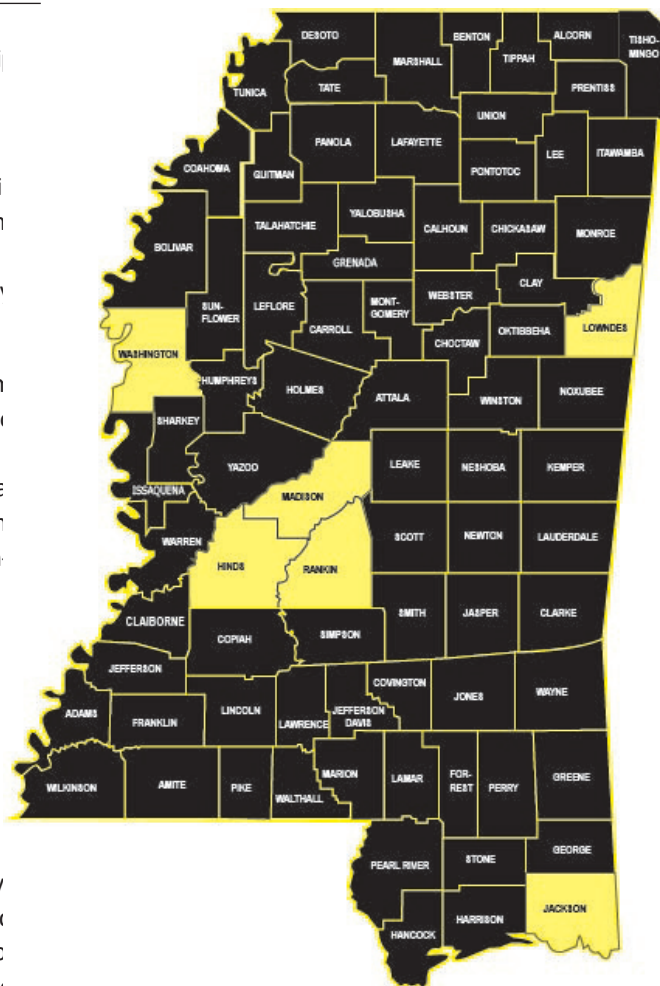
Data from this report show that community factors — including experienced teachers, family homeownership, median household income — play a part in successful school districts.

The direct impact of such community factors, such as income and housing, underlines the need for more form action and coordination between education, business and community leaders in strategic planning and policy development for local schools.

Just as a teacher cannot educate a student in a vacuum without support of administrators and parents, a school district cannot operate and set policy without support from community, business and political leadership. Formal and informal planning and cooperation outside of traditional government structures would benefit schools and contribute to success of students.

Communities cannot be successful without successful schools and vice versa. Education is and always has been a family function. That family includes students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, local government officials, economic developers, business and community leaders.

The hard data in this report show how very much they are intertwined and dependent on one another for success. Looking at these facts through the truthful eyes of hard data shows the pathway to more successful schools and healthier communities.



## Let's Close the Gaps

All Hands on Deck - Let's Close the Gaps and Prepare our Children for the 21st Century

Are we preparing our students and communities for the 21st Century? The answer to that question should govern the actions of our civic, community and elected leaders. Truthful Eyes is an analysis of data — school district and community data. Mississippi Department of Education and U.S. Census data has been reviewed to get a deep understanding of school district performance, community economic well-being and their correlation. Specifically, data was analyzed and compared from adjoining districts in the same county.

Students, schools and districts do not operate in a vacuum. Many times, in our focus on school and district performance, we forget that the students, teachers, administrators and schools are integral components of neighborhoods, communities, cities and counties. School and district performance affects economic and employment opportunities and vice versa.

Mississippi was one of three states that lost population since 2010. Our per capita income is \$24,369. Our median Family income is \$45,081. Twenty percent of our families live below the poverty level. We are 56% White and 38% Black.

These numbers give a glance at the state. More revealing are the wide disparities that can exist between and within counties, disparities that are directly impactful on school districts, educational opportunities for children in those districts and the economic opportunities of this state.

A question is: How do we close the opportunity and education gaps in our state and prepare our children for the 21st Century? The answer, our policymakers at all levels — legislators, supervisors, municipal elected officials and school boards — must work collaboratively. Data must be used to inform their decisions while crafting solutions that Leave No Child Behind.<sup>®</sup> It is unacceptable that within the same county huge educational and opportunity gaps exist. A child's future must not be determined by his or her zip code.

**Equitable funding is foundational. Under-resourced districts and communities require additional investments. State, local and school district policies and practices must be designed and implemented to:**

- Strengthen ties between students, teachers, parents, community organizations and school districts.
- Increase investment in state-of-the-art data analytic tools and use the analytics to inform district decision making.
- Increase investment in pre-K and kindergarten up to and including mandatory pre-K and kindergarten.
- Incentivize experienced teachers and administrators to work in underperforming districts.
- Increase professional development for new and inexperienced teachers and administrators including coaching and shadowing.
- Design collaborative strategic alignment and policy plans across governmental and educational governance entities.
- Increase homeownership.
- Create opportunities for parents to enhance their skills and/or education.
- Recruit, create and retain high-wage jobs.
- Provide affordable technology and broadband access to all.

**Implementing these policies will:**

- Close the reading and math proficiency gap.
- Close the high school graduation and college readiness gap.
- Close the poverty gap.

This pandemic has unearthed the rampant inequities in our state. Inequities can and must be remedied if we collectively are to survive and thrive.

Collaboration and using data is essential if we are going to prepare our children for the 21st Century. It is in our collective best interest.

Now is the time!!



**Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald**  
*Southern Regional Director,  
Children's Defense Fund-  
Southern Regional Office*



# TRUTHFUL EYES: A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

## ABOUT THE TEAM

### P3 STRATEGIES, LLC

The mission of P3 Strategies, LLC is to enhance the quality of life for all children and their communities. We partner with schools and districts, non-profits, for-profits, business and government to accelerate achievement for students and schools. We advocate for policies and programs that advance health, education and the well-being of all children. We communicate information to multiple constituents. And, we assist our clients integrate real-time data into their programs and services. A devotion to social justice and civil society undergirds all of our work.

### PAMELA SHAW

A senior manager, entrepreneur, and public policy analyst, Pamela Shaw is a seasoned leader, tactician, organizer and devotee to social justice. She has more than 20 years of experience focused on the health, education and management training



and development of children, families and service providers in vulnerable communities and organizations. She is a native Mississippian with degrees from Southern University and the University of Maryland.

### JIMMIE GATES

Jimmie E. Gates is a retired legal and political writer as well as former columnist for the Mississippi Clarion Ledger. Jimmie is a veteran journalist who has covered the people, places and things that make Mississippi special for almost four decades. Jimmie has won numerous awards, including the Sigma Delta Chi award, the Best of Gannett, the Mississippi Press Association reporting award and the National Association of Black Journalists award. Jimmie



is a member of the regional Hall of Fame of the National Association of Black Journalists. He has appeared on True Crime national shows, including TV One's "Fatal Attraction" and "For My Man," "Snapped," and "Redrum," which is murder spelled backward. Jimmie also served as a researcher and consultant for the television show CourtTV. A graduate of Jackson State University, Jimmie and his wife, Pattie, are parents of one child.

### DAVID HAMPTON

David Hampton is a veteran journalist who spent 37 years as a writer and editor at Mississippi newspapers. Hampton, 68, is a native of Tennessee and graduate of the University of Memphis. He joined the Jackson newspapers in 1976 as a government and political writer. He served a stint at The Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News Washington, D.C., bureau in 1982 and came back to Mississippi as



metro editor for the newspapers. He became editorial director in 1986 and oversaw The Clarion-Ledger's opinion pages for 26 years before his retirement in 2012. He now is a freelance writer and teaches journalism. He has won numerous writing awards and in 2012, was inducted into the Mississippi Press Association Hall of Fame for his contributions to Mississippi journalism.

### GUS VARGAS

A senior K12 technology architect and reformist, business intelligence consultant, Gus Vargas designs and implements technology solutions that fundamentally change data practices and analysis in public education. He maximizes the potential of technology solutions and designs training programs that produce lasting results. He designs web applications for national education firms and state asso-



ciations, business intelligence solutions for public education systems, online training for state agencies and has developed k12 education tools that are used to help thousands of educators in their daily work. A native of Northern California, Vargas holds degrees from California State University, Sacramento and California State University, East Bay.

# A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CALL TO ACTION



## TRUTHFUL EYES

A LOOK AT MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS



■ ■ ■ ■ This report is commissioned by the  
Children's Defense Fund-Southern Regional Office  
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