K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Mississippi Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Mississippi.

This guide profiles **Mississippi**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi educates roughly 430,000 public K–12 students across about 137 school districts (county and municipal/separate districts), overseen by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the State Board. Mississippi has drawn national attention for the "Mississippi Miracle" — a dramatic rise in early-reading achievement...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 6 (by September 1)
- **End of compulsory age** — 17
- **Districts** — ~137 county and municipal districts
- **Satisfying it** — Public, nonpublic, or home study

PRE-K IN MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi does not offer a universal pre-K program. State-funded early education runs primarily through Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) — public-private partnerships (blending districts, Head Start, and licensed providers) that deliver high-quality preschool in participating communities, largely for at-risk and income-eligible...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 6–17**
Districts	**~137**
Testing	**MAAP**
Diploma	**~24 units**
Choice	**Special-needs ESA**

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Mississippi's largest districts include DeSoto County (the state's largest), Rankin County , Jackson Public Schools , and Harrison County on the Gulf Coast. Mississippi has a small charter-school sector — charters are authorized by the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board and are concentrated mainly in Jackson and other...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI

- **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as St. Andrew's Episcopal School , Jackson Academy, and Jackson Preparatory School (Jackson area)
- **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Jackson and Diocese of Biloxi schools (such as St. Joseph Catholic)
- **Other religious & Christian schools** — A large network of Christian and faith-based academies statewide
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Mississippi uses the MAAP (Mississippi Academic Assessment Program) in grades 3–8 and as End-of-Course (EOC) exams in high school, plus the ACT in grade 11. The EOC exams connect to graduation . Run by the Mississippi Department of Education.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **MAAP (grades 3–8)** — English language arts and mathematics; science in grades 5 and 8
- **MAAP EOC (high school)** — Algebra I, English II, Biology, and U.S. History
- **ACT (grade 11)** — A statewide college-entrance test
- **MAAP-A** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

MAAP and EOC exams are online , with multiple-choice and constructed-response items. EOCs are taken when students finish the matching course.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

Yes — with options. Mississippi students must meet the requirement on the EOC exams (or use approved alternatives , such as a concordant ACT/other score, or a combination that reaches the required overall performance). Students who don't pass get retests and additional options. Confirm the current policy with your school.

AT A GLANCE	
Grades 3–8	**MAAP**
Subjects	**ELA, Math; Science 5 & 8**
High school	**MAAP EOC**
EOC subjects	**Algebra I, English II, Biology…**
Grad requirement?	**Yes — EOC (with options)**
Format	**Online**

HOW IT'S SCORED

MAAP reports performance levels (1–5, with Level 4+ proficient); EOC results feed graduation and accountability. The grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.

TESTING WINDOWS

MAAP (grades 3–8) is given in a spring window ; EOCs run in fall, spring, and summer windows tied to courses.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **Practice tests & released items** — MDE provides practice materials matching the online format
- **Course-aligned review** — EOCs test the specific course
- **ACT prep for grade 11** — Our ACT guide applies to the statewide ACT

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades and courses participate. Ask your district about make-up and retest windows.

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Mississippi requires 24 units for the Traditional diploma, with optional endorsements (Academic, Distinguished Academic, and CTE). Students take subject-area tests, but Mississippi provides multiple options to meet the assessment requirement rather than a single pass-or-fail exit exam.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The Traditional (24-unit) diploma includes 4 English, 4 math, 4 science, 4 social studies, 1 arts, 0.5 health/PE, 1 technology/computer, and electives. Endorsements add rigorous or CTE coursework.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Students take subject-area assessments , but Mississippi allows several options to satisfy the requirement (including concordant scores like the ACT and other approved measures). Confirm the current rules with your district.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Mississippi offers the Traditional diploma plus Academic, Distinguished Academic, and CTE endorsements , and the Seal of Biliteracy . Strong records support HELP/MESG eligibility (see MS financial aid).

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual enrollment, AP, and CTE offer accelerated and career-focused pathways.

AT A GLANCE

Units	**24 (Traditional)**
Endorsements	**Academic, Distinguished, CTE**
Exit exam?	**No strict single exit exam**
Assessment	**Subject-area tests with options**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does Mississippi require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does Mississippi require a test to graduate?** — No strict single exit exam — students take subject-area tests with several options to meet the requirement.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

MISSISSIPPI — PART 4 OF 7

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Mississippi gives each school an A-F grade under its statewide accountability system, calculated from a points system across several indicators.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Mississippi's A-F grade combines points for proficiency and growth in reading and math (including growth for the lowest-performing students), science, graduation rate, acceleration/readiness, and English-learner progress . The total maps to a letter. Growth counts heavily — read it alongside the grade.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school's grade on the Mississippi Department of Education report cards. Review the growth and component scores and the trend, not just the letter.

AT A GLANCE

Format	**A-F letter grades**
Based on	**A points system across indicator...**
Tool	**MDE report cards**
Look up at	**mdek12.org**

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does Mississippi rate schools?** — Mississippi assigns an A-F grade from a points system where growth counts heavily.
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Mississippi's private-choice programs are primarily targeted to students with specific needs — including the Mississippi ESA for students with disabilities and scholarships for dyslexia and speech-language therapy. Mississippi also has a public charter sector. It does not currently have a universal program.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

Mississippi runs several disability-focused programs: the Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs (ESA) , the Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship (a voucher), and the Speech-Language Therapy Scholarship . Each helps eligible students attend participating private schools or access services. Confirm current programs and eligibility.

ELIGIBILITY

These programs are eligibility-limited (based on disability, dyslexia, or speech-language needs), not universal. Confirm current criteria.

APPLYING

Apply through the Mississippi Department of Education's programs for each scholarship. Confirm windows and requirements.

AT A GLANCE

Programs	**Special-needs ESAs (disability-b...**
Includes	**Dyslexia & speech-language schol...**
Type	**Targeted ESAs (not universal)**
Plus	**Public charters**
Confirm with	**The state program**

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does Mississippi have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes (targeted) — Mississippi has special-needs ESAs and dyslexia/speech-language scholarships (not universal).
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Mississippi licenses teachers through the Mississippi Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams (and a reading test), and earn a Standard License .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying ACT/SAT scores
- **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your license area
- **Foundations of Reading** — Required for elementary candidates
- **Note** — Requirements vary by license — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	**Mississippi Department of Educat...**
Content	**Praxis Subject Assessments**
Reading	**Foundations of Reading**
Basic skills	**Praxis Core (or qualifying score...**

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Mississippi, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams)...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Mississippis agency and your current state

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Mississippi administers state aid through the Office of Student Financial Aid (SFA) , with a mix of need-based and merit grants — including a program that can cover full tuition for high-achieving low-income students.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **Higher Education Legislative Plan (HELP) Grant** — Covers full tuition at Mississippi public colleges for eligible low-income, high-achieving residents (income and GPA/ACT requirements).
- **Mississippi Tuition Assistance Grant (MTAG)** — Partial aid for residents who don't receive a full Pell Grant.
- **Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance (MRTA)** — For dependents of certain public-safety officers and service members.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant (MESG)** — A merit award for students with high GPA and ACT scores at eligible Mississippi colleges.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Mississippi offers the Mississippi Affordable College Savings (MACS) 529 and the MPACT prepaid tuition plan, with a state tax deduction.

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

AT A GLANCE

Need (full tuition)	**HELP Grant**
Partial need	**MTAG**
Merit	**Eminent Scholars Grant (MESG)**
529 plan	**MACS / MPACT**
Agency	**MS SFA**

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do I get Mississippi state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid administers the programs.
- **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Mississippi offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Mississippi aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ MISSISSIPPI'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
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