

Improving Reading Performance:



Teaching Pre-K
Phonological
Awareness at Van
Winkle Elementary
in Jackson, MS

What Northern New England Can Learn from Mississippi

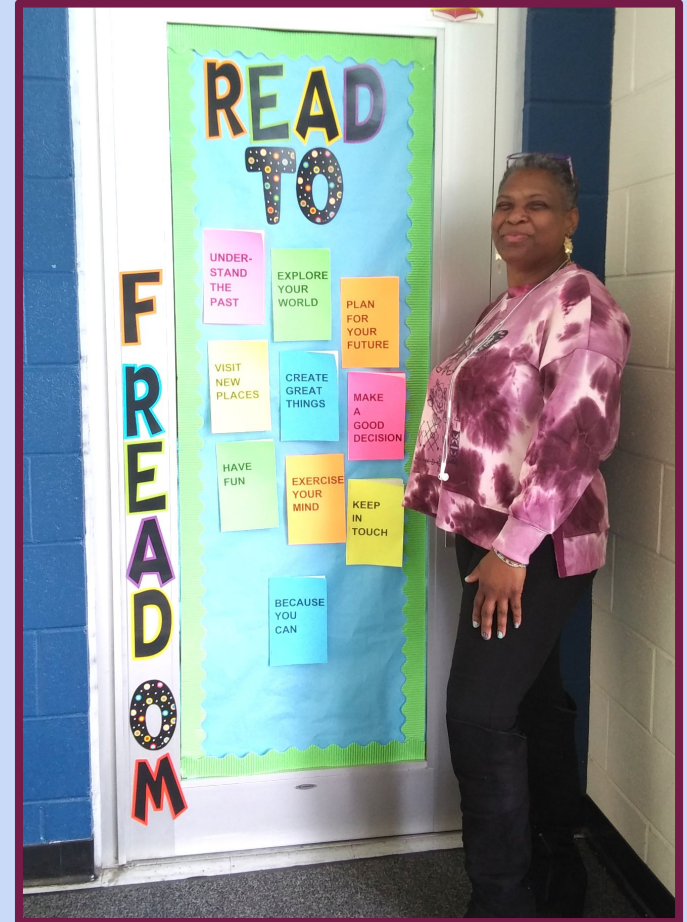
Background

In 2000, when the National Reading Panel published, ***Teaching Children to Read***, the Barksdale Reading Institute launched a \$100M initiative to train Mississippi educators in evidence-based practices. Its success laid the foundation for the Mississippi State Legislature to pass the ***Literacy-Based Promotion Act*** in 2013.

The “Mississippi Miracle” has made national headlines for the steady increase in student reading and mathematics performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

“If you can’t read, you’re not free.”

– Trinette Frazier, Librarian, Kirksey Middle School



Research Questions

What lay behind the numbers?

What school and district practices shaped the law?

**What can we learn from the voices
of educators doing the work?**

**What other lessons can states learn from
Mississippi's trailblazing?**



Research Process

Over several months prior to visiting Mississippi, research on the impact of the ***Literacy-Based Promotion Act*** and other aspects of Mississippi education were conducted. Once in the state, qualitative data-gathering included:

1. Observations of ELA instruction in Pre-K, elementary, middle, and high schools, a total of 6 sites
2. Interviews with 6 principals, 3 assistant superintendents, a middle-school teacher team, and the President of the Miss. Association of Teachers
3. Focus-group interview with Jackson district and school administrators, literacy coaches, and teacher leaders
4. Interviews with literacy leaders at the Mississippi Dept. of Education and Barksdale Reading Institute



Van Winkle
Elementary School

Bringing You Research Findings

Mississippi may be some 1500 miles away from the upper reaches of Northern New England, but every state and school district must find its way to teach all children to read.

This presentation highlights findings from Mississippi, not recommendations for change at home. Instead, the findings can lead to questioning long-held assumptions and imagining new possibilities to provide a top-quality education for the students of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

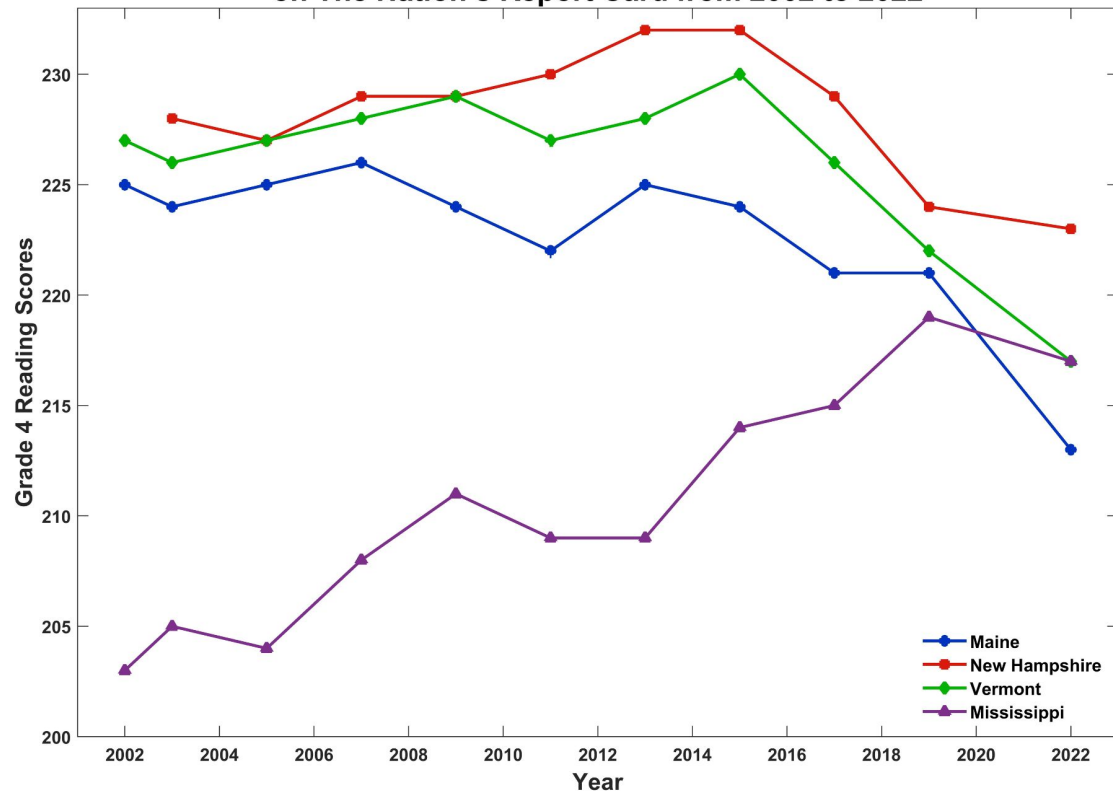
The findings present opportunities for discussion and can inform decision making as our states undertake changes in literacy practices.



North Jackson
Elementary

In 2013, Mississippi ranked at the bottom in reading on the NAEP.

**Maine, New Hampshire Vermont, and Mississippi Grade 4 Reading Scores
on The Nation's Report Card from 2002 to 2022**



In 2022, it ranked 21st in the country, tying its scores with Vermont's.

Background on Mississippi Literacy Legislation

Legislation was built on the successes of the Barksdale Reading Institute, State Department of Education, and participating school districts. These included:

- Training 15,000 teachers and principals
- Hiring coaches with expertise in the science of reading
- Adopting a Structured Literacy block taught by trained teachers and interventionists in elementary schools
- Teaching the 5 Components of Reading with an evidence-based curriculum scope and sequence
- Administering effective assessments and analyzing data for instructional decision making
- Creating teacher Professional Learning Communities focused on reading outcomes

Highlights of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act

The 2013 Legislation required districts to:

- Administer a universal screener to identify struggling readers in grades K-3
- Provide immediate intervention to K-3 students substantially below grade level in reading
- Prohibit grade promotion of 3rd graders reading below grade level, unless previously received extensive reading intervention, or qualified for an exemption
- Report each student's reading progress to parents
- Create a parent contract for struggling readers with a "Read at Home" plan
- Report each school's progress in reading to local media outlets
- Adopt and report on a literacy improvement plan (for schools rated C–F only)

The law created a State Reading Panel of Legislators, State Education Superintendent and others.

"Blanketing the state with professional development at the same time was a game changer. Local control is the American way, but the state level is much more effective and impactful."

– Kelly Butler, Chief Executive Officer, The Barksdale Reading Institute

Comparison of 4th-grade Reading Performance in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Mississippi, and Nationally on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

Average NAEP Reading Scores of 4th Graders	Maine	New Hampshire	Vermont	Mississippi	National Average
2013	225	232	228	209	222
2022	213	223	217	217	216
2022 Percentage of students proficient (score of 3 or 4)	29.2%	37%	33.6%	30.6%	32%
2013 - 2022 Change in performance	-12	-9	-11	+8	-6

Reading Performance of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-price Lunch, Childhood Poverty, and Per Pupil Expenditure

Reading Performance, Poverty Indicators and Per Pupil Expenditure	Maine	New Hampshire	Vermont	Mississippi	National Average
2019 Percentage of 4th graders reading on grade level , who qualify for free/reduced-price lunch*	23.2%	21.3%	21.4%	25.9%	21.1%
2019 Percentage of Pre–K–12 students who qualify for free/reduced-price lunch	42%	24.7%	35.1%	74.8%	52.1%
2022 Childhood poverty rate	13.8%	8.9%	10.2%	28.1%	17%
2022 Public education per pupil expenditure	\$15,700	\$17,500	\$21,200	\$9,300	\$14,840

*Most recent figures available

NAEP 4th-grade Reading
Proficiency Level Cut Scores

Basic (partial proficiency): **208**
Proficiency: **238**
Advanced: **268**

NAEP Reading Scores of 4th Graders by Income Level	Maine	New Hampshire	Vermont	Mississippi	National Average
2022 4th-graders NOT ELIGIBLE for free/reduced price lunch (middle-high income)	223	228	227	236	231
2022 4th-graders ELIGIBLE for free/reduced price lunch (low-income)	197	204	202	212	203
Difference in scores between the two student groups	26 points	24 points	25 points	24 points	28 points

Mississippi's improved reading performance deserves a much closer look.



Hazlehurst Elementary School



“Teachers were crying for help.
Students were moving to the
next grade level unable to read.”

– Erica Webber Jones, President,
Mississippi Association of Educators

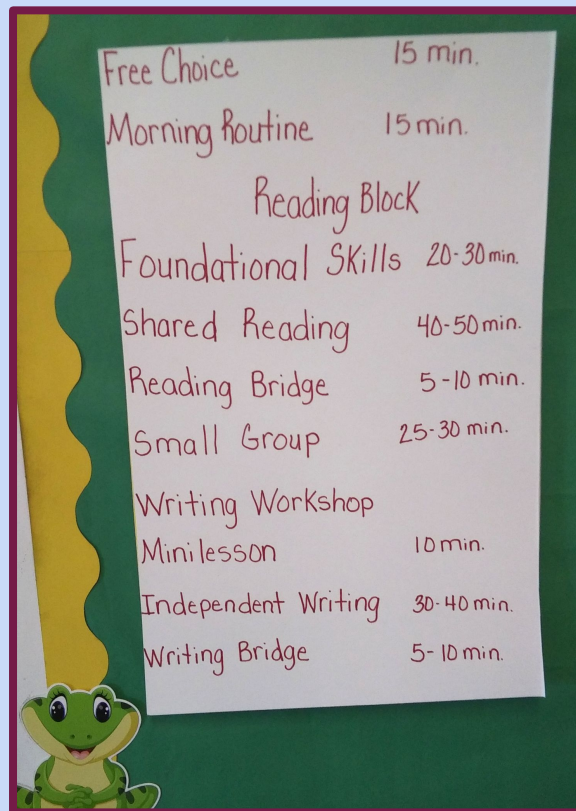
Finding #1: Students are ready to participate in evidence-based instruction.

“The reason why students are motivated is because of your belief in them.”

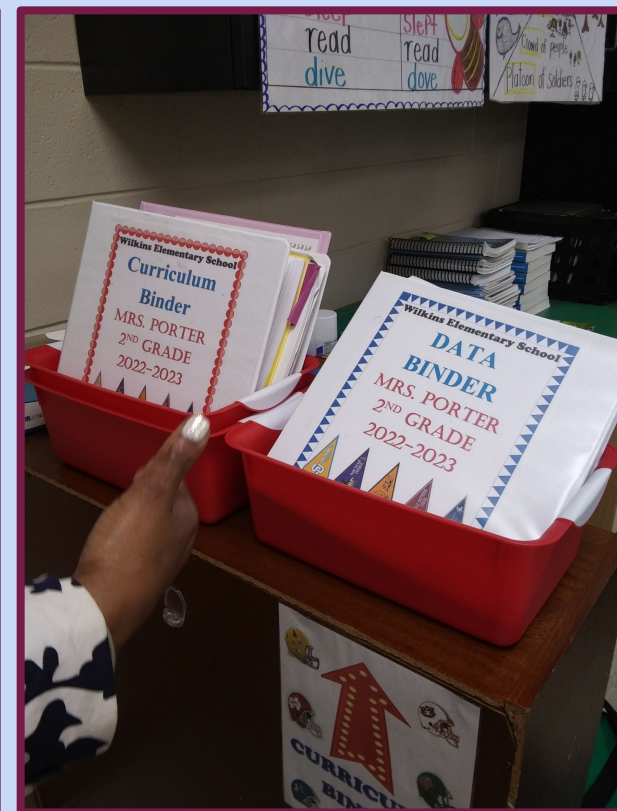
- Dr. Kathleen Grigsby, Assistant Superintendent of Jackson Elementary Schools



North Jackson Elementary

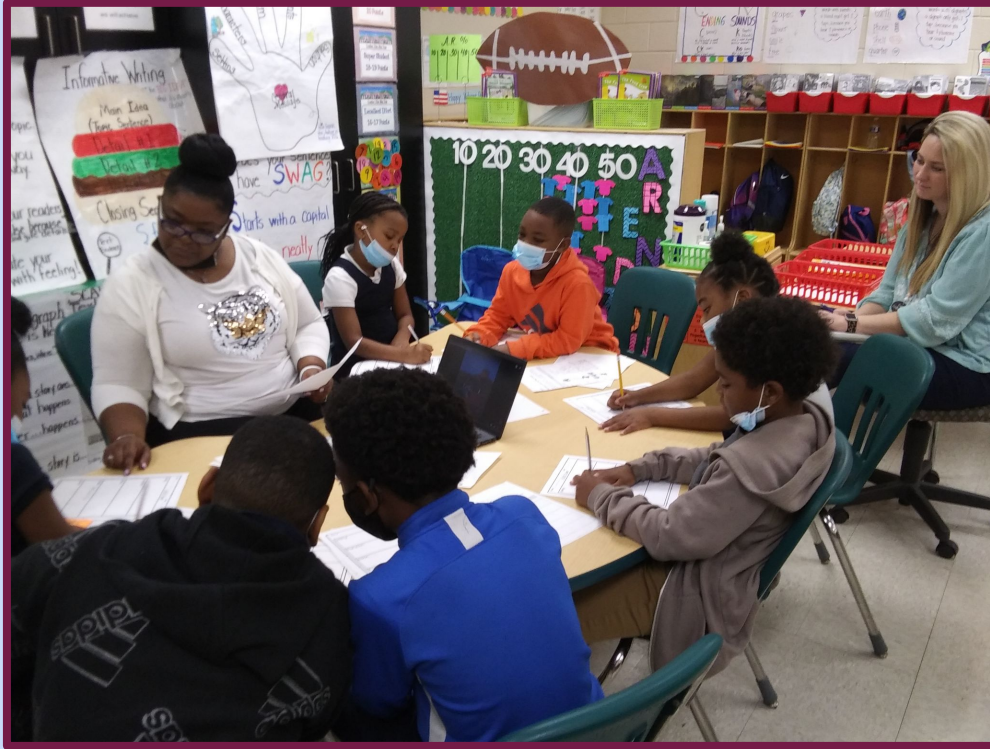


Hazlehurst Elementary



Wilkins Elementary

Finding #2: School and classroom procedures reflect high learning expectations.



Miss Hamilton teaches her 2nd graders, grouped by instructional need, observed and mentored by the school literacy coach.



Mrs. Porter's 2nd-grade class gather materials for the next learning activity.

Galloway Elementary School



School Procedures and Processes

Beginning the Day

- When entering the classroom, students should first put away belongings (backpacks, coats, etc.).
- Students should place homework from the previous day in the designated area and get started on Morning Work/Bell Ringer/Do Now.
- Take attendance, send attendance roster to the office by 8:00am each morning.

In the Hallway

Ensure that students:

- Use walking feet in the hallway.
- Keep hands and feet to yourself.
- Walk one behind the other.
- Use a quiet voice.



During the Day

- Follow Instructional Schedules with fidelity. Teach from Bell-to-Bell!
- Use Lesson Plans as a guide to outline what you'll teach in a given lesson and to provide justification for why you're teaching it.
- Set goals with students and assist them in monitoring their progress.
- Manage classrooms to ensure that instructional days run smoothly, without disruptive behavior from students.

Using the Restroom

- Students leaving the classroom to use the restroom should have a hallway/restroom pass, be accompanied by a trusted restroom monitor and timed for classroom leave time.
- Students should take a restroom/hallway pass when they leave or use charts to track who is gone. These practices increase safety by enabling a teacher to know the whereabouts of every student at all times.
- Grades Pre-K – 2nd will use restrooms in the classroom. Students must be monitored by the teacher or instructional assistant when using the restrooms in the hallway.

Ending the Day

Students should put all their materials away, clean off their desk or table, and put work to take home in their homework folder at the end of the day (usually beginning this process about fifteen minutes before the final bell rings).

Fire Drills

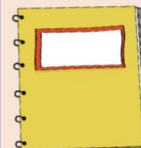
When the fire alarm sounds, students must stop what they are doing, calmly place everything right where they are, and quietly walk to the door. Teachers are responsible for tracking attendance, reporting immediately to administration if someone is missing. Once outside, everyone is expected to stand quietly and wait for the announcement to come back into the building.



Additional Procedures

You can integrate more sophisticated routines into your classroom gradually. Teach your students the following procedures a few at a time for best results.

- Going to the office (when getting picked up or visiting the nurse)
- How to behave when there are classroom visitors
- What to do during assemblies
- Where, when, and how to submit homework
- Returning classroom supplies to their places
- Handling classroom equipment (i.e. scissors)
- Getting ready for lunch, recess, or specials
- Transitioning to the next class (3rd – 5th Grades)
- How to safely use a computer
- Participating in learning centers
- What to do during announcements



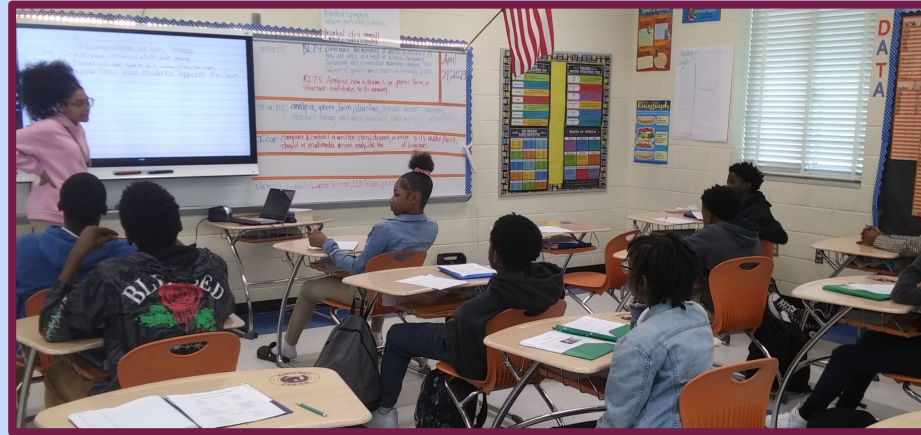
The expectations of adults are:

- Greet all students and adults around the school.
- Model positive, responsible behavior with colleagues and students.
- Ensure all students have a pass when out of the classroom.
- Ask any visitor without a visitor pass to check in at the office.



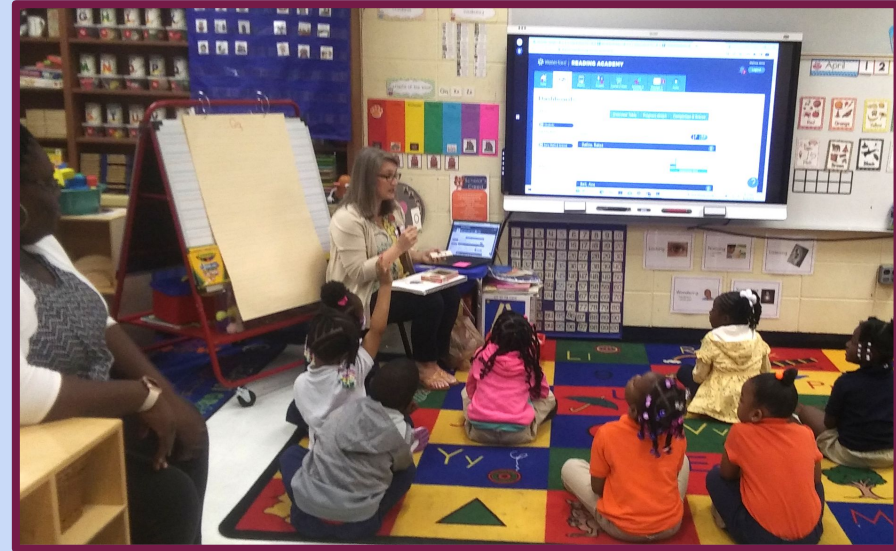
#3 - The school day and year address students' learning needs in Jackson and Hazlehurst.

- Morning tutoring: 7:15 - 7:45 AM
 - School day: 7:45 AM - 3:00 PM
 - Grades K-3: **120-min. daily** reading & writing instruction
 - Grades 4-8: **90-min. daily** ELA and/or reading classes
- 40-50 minutes daily teacher planning time



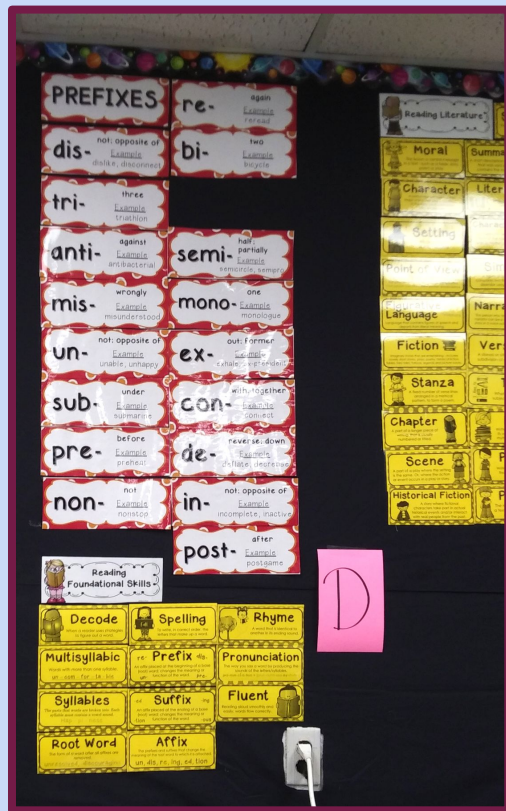
English Language Arts class at Kirksey Middle School

- Grades K-5: After-school intervention programs
- Grades K-12 **Pre-teaching grade-level curriculum** in summer school

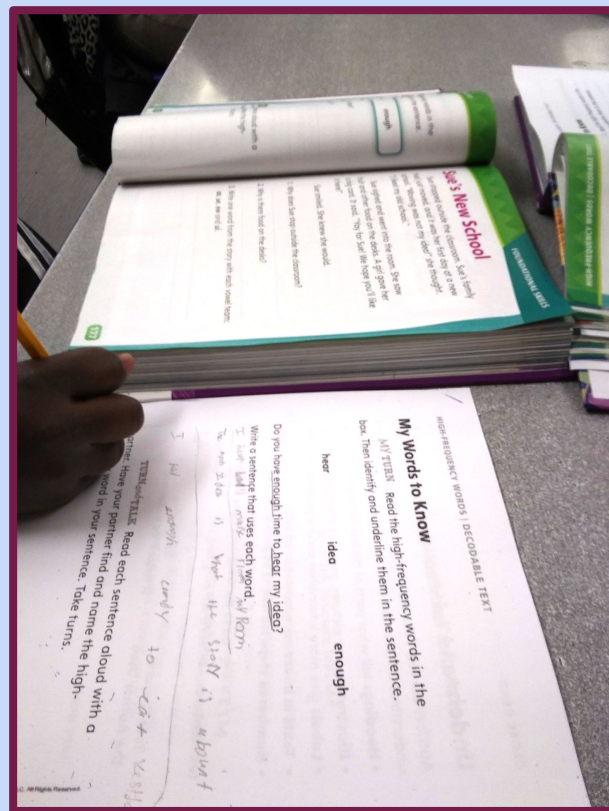


Pre-K students practice daily letter name and sounds at North Jackson School.

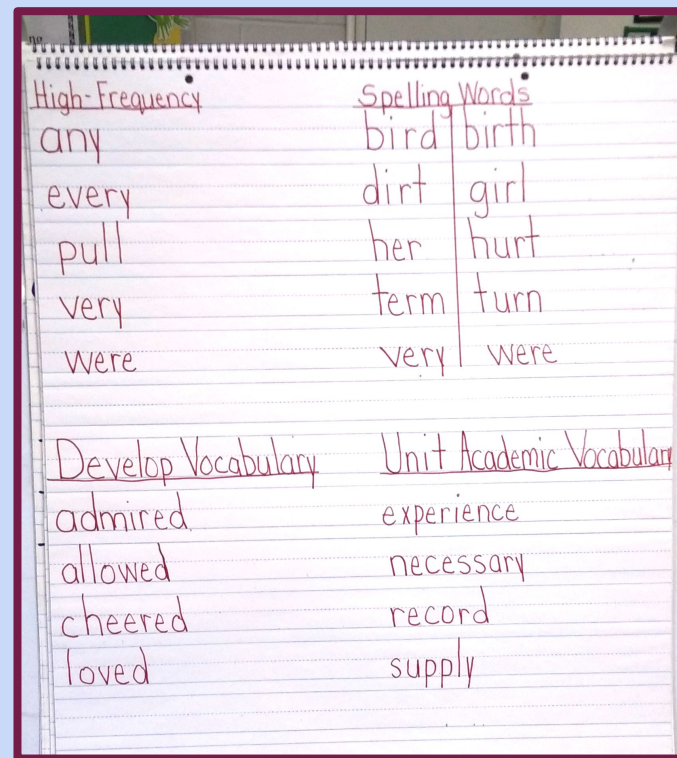
Finding #4: Highly-motivated educators fully focus on literacy instruction.



Morphology wall



Vertically-aligned activities

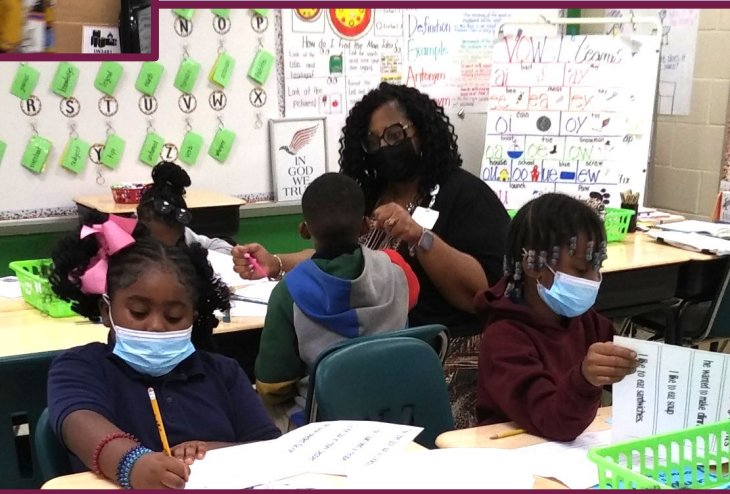
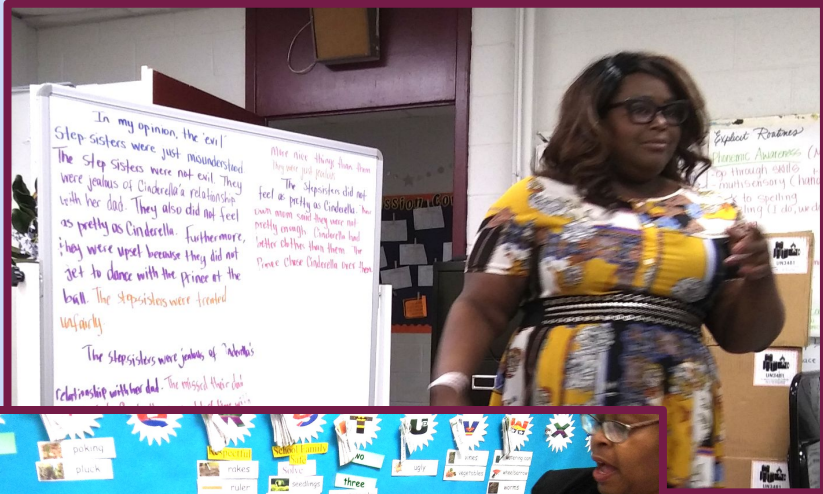


Direct vocabulary and spelling instruction

Finding #5: Principals and teachers fully embrace coaching.

Coaching Opportunities for Teacher Learning

- School-based coaching with lead teachers
- District-level coaches
- Mississippi Department of Education coaches
- Barksdale Institute coaches
- Principals serve as coaches, spending 4-5 hours in classrooms daily



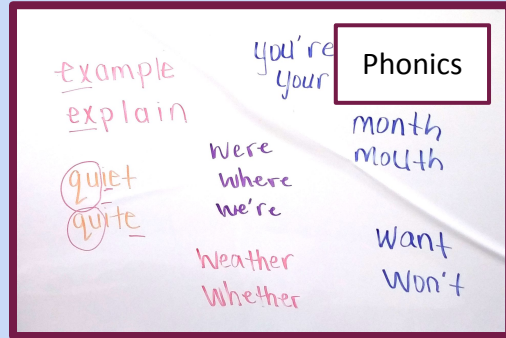
(top to bottom left)
Principals
Lockett-Langston,
Barnes, and Brown
help teach and
provide PD for their
faculty.

Districts must adopt high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) grounded in the 5 components of reading.

Phonemic Awareness



Phonics



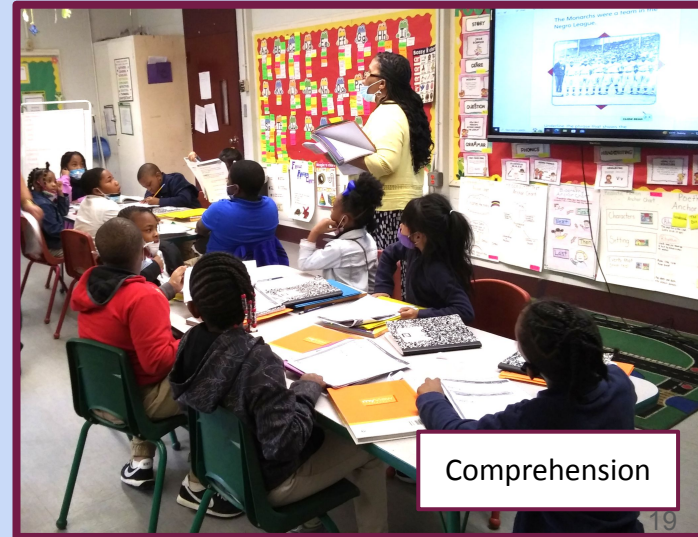
Vocabulary



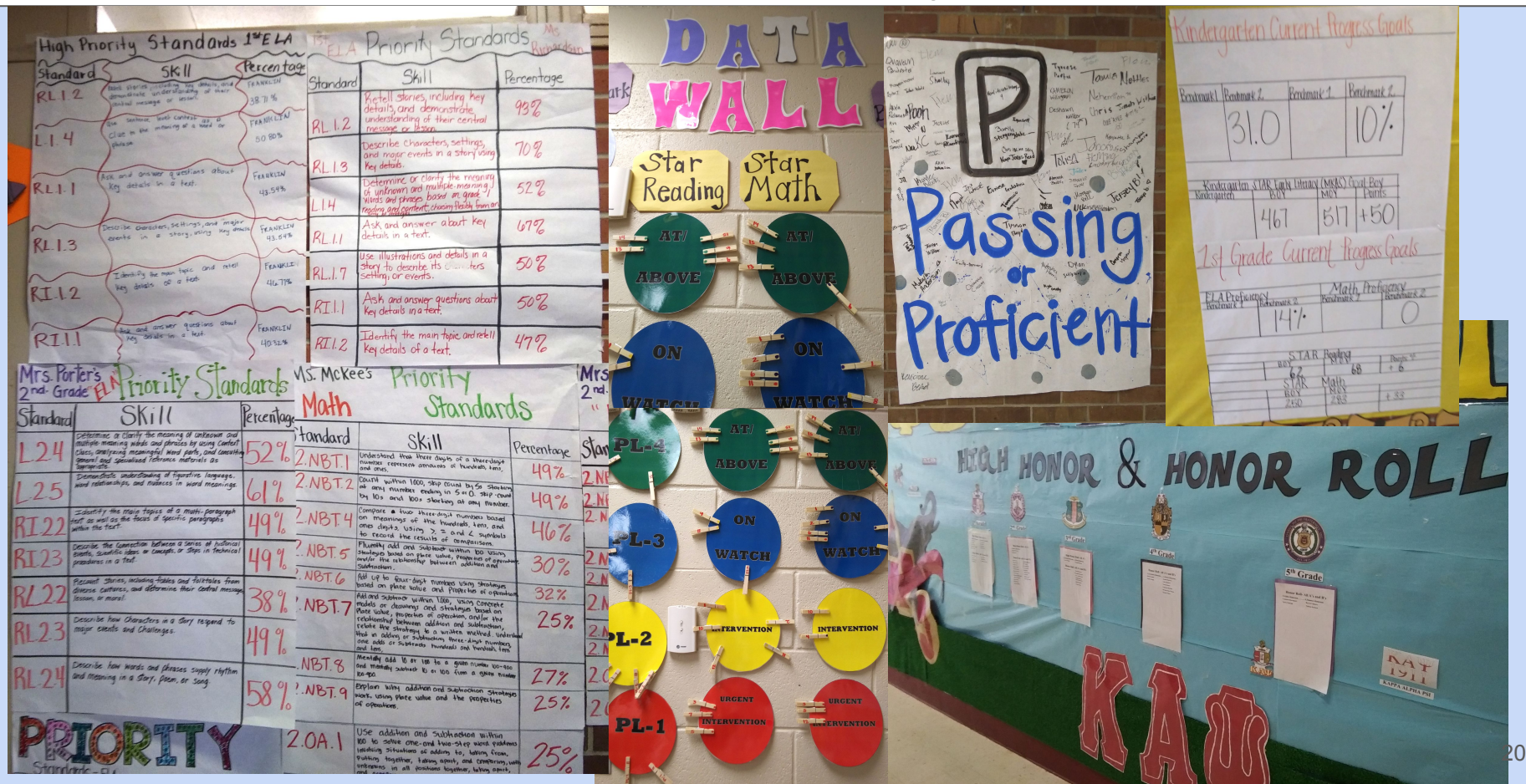
Fluency



Comprehension



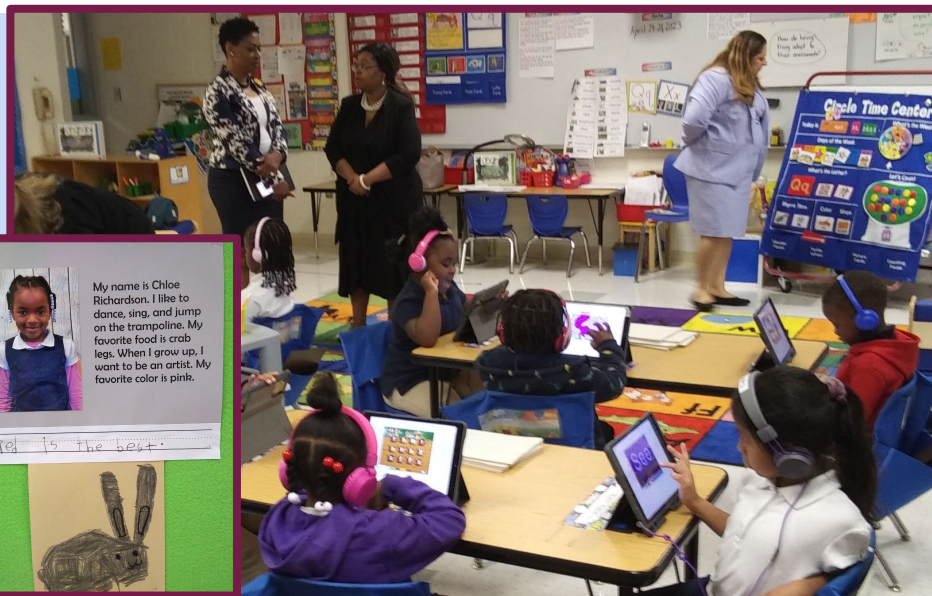
Finding #6: Frequent assessment, data analysis, and reporting inform teachers' instruction and motivate students to perform their best.



Finding #7: Pre-K builds the foundation as a model of educational excellence.

Leadership at Van Winkle Early Education Center for the City of Jackson

- Open for students Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 6:00 PM + summer
- Provides free transportation, breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner.
- Offers universal Pre-K for all 4-year-olds.
 - Students with special needs start at age 3.
- Provides training to staff at Head Start and private childcare centers



"There is a growth mindset from the top. We are intentional about creating a strong start. We know what they need to do in early literacy, and we can see many are already behind."

– Kathleen Billiot, Pre-K teacher, Classroom Model & Grade Leader

Finding #8: Nearly all students qualifying for special education spend 80% of their day taught by their general-education teachers.

Van Winkle Elementary



North Jackson Elementary

Hands-on letter recognition game in a self-contained Pre-K special-education classroom

Gifted classroom (right)

“Never take your eyes off the **high fliers. They’re harder to grow then.”**

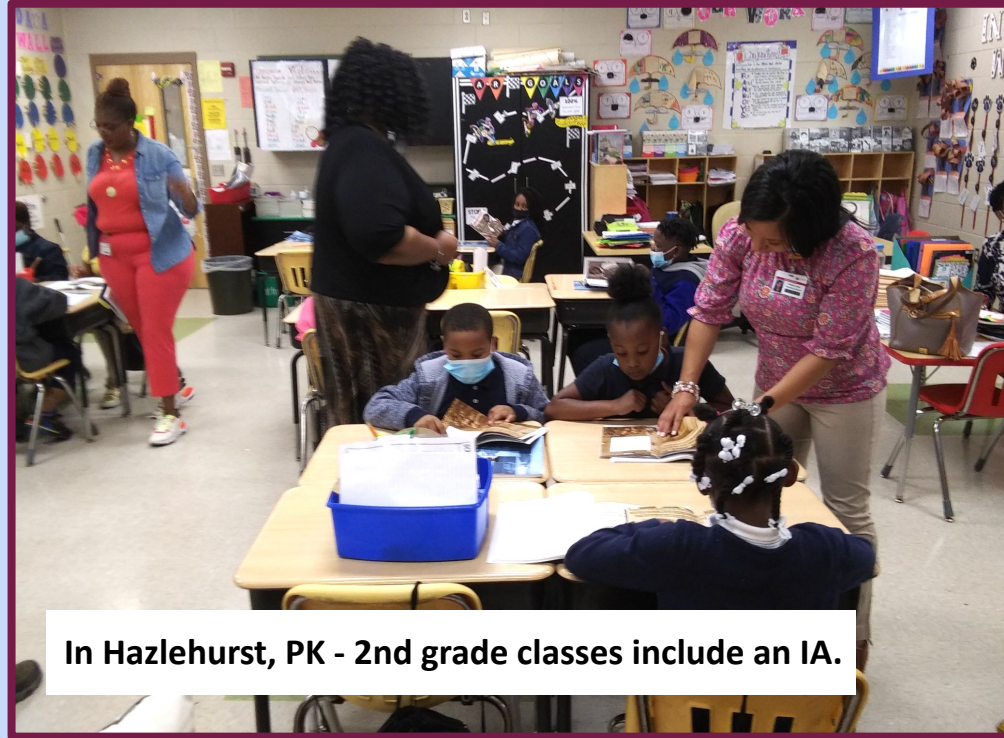
– Principal Barnes

By statute, Mississippi public schools provide gifted education in grades 2-6 for 5 hours per week. Students are chosen based on assessments and creativity.

Finding #9: In Jackson, *every* Pre–K–1 classroom includes a full-time instructional assistant.

Instructional Assistants

- Provide students learning, social, and emotional supports, especially to those struggling.
- Manage and support students while the teacher provides whole-class and small-group instruction.
- Receive literacy and other training during the school day and other times, often alongside classroom teachers.
- Support classroom instruction when teachers are absent.



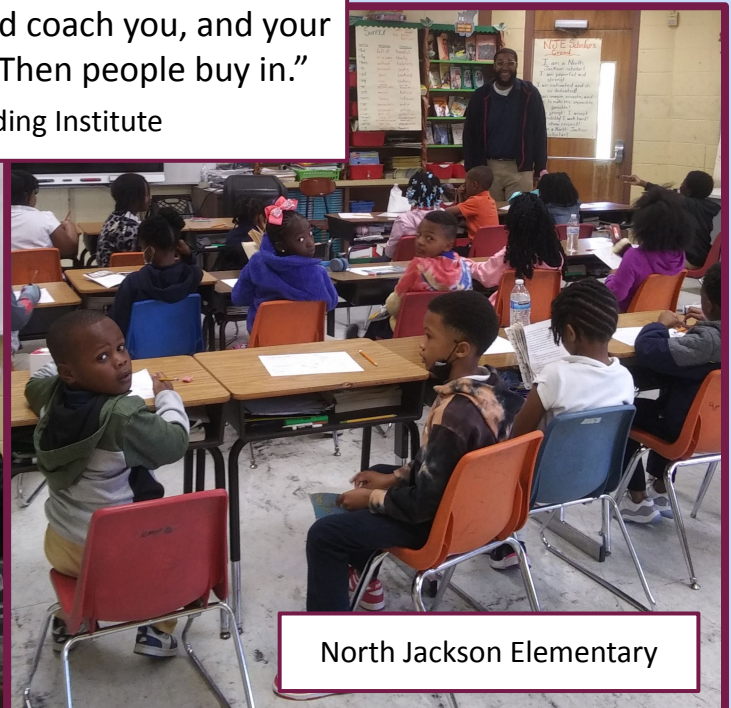
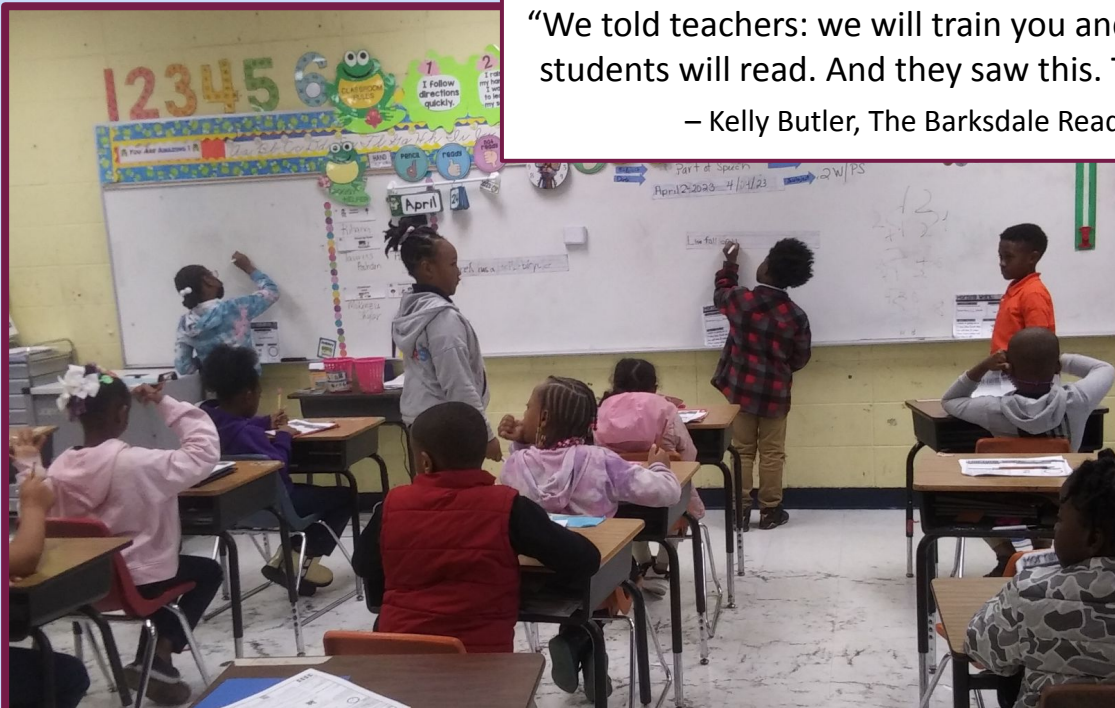
In Hazlehurst, PK - 2nd grade classes include an IA.

20,401 students attend Jackson Public Schools.

Approximately 3 students in the district have a 1:1 paraeducator. About 7 students attend the district's separate mental-health program, with the immediate goal of returning to their school.

Finding #10: An evidence-based curriculum supports teachers as they learn about the foundations of English and the science of reading.

“We told teachers: we will train you and coach you, and your students will read. And they saw this. Then people buy in.”
– Kelly Butler, The Barksdale Reading Institute



North Jackson Elementary

The curriculum advances students’ language and literacy with effective activities and repeated practice in order to achieve mastery.

Recommendations from Jackson Educational Leaders to Other States

1. Expect principals to do Learning Walks and visit classrooms daily.
2. Train teachers to be researchers so instruction is based on evidence.
3. Start high-quality training with kindergarten teachers.
4. Provide before- and after-school programs for addressing deficits.
5. Phase in high-stakes testing to allow schools to prepare.
6. Include social-emotional learning.
7. ***Don't give school ratings.***
8. ***Start accountability before 3rd grade.***



"Great leaders produce great teachers."

Recommendations from Jackson Educational Leaders to Other States

“PBIS teaches self-control. Without self-control, you don’t have agency for yourself or others.”

– Dr. Kathleen Grigsby, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education, Jackson Schools

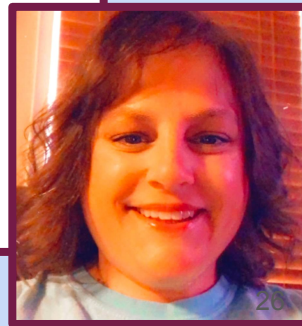


“The teacher is more targeted and on task. The text builds the background knowledge so kids have more to talk about.”

– Kim Luckett-Langston, Principal, Hazlehurst Elementary School

“Teachers have to go to the lowest skill level, which helps social-emotional, classroom management, and climate. All behaviors will manifest when children feel uncomfortable, frustrated, and incapable of achieving what their peers are.”

– Kathleen Billiot, Pre-K teacher, Classroom Model and Grade Leader



Conclusion

Changes in literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment united with existing Mississippi practices. Not once did educators mention poverty, high student mobility, family difficulties, or other socioeconomic disadvantages as barriers to literacy. Classroom and whole-school norms and procedures allowed both teachers and students to grow in a safe, orderly environment. In every classroom beginning in Pre–K and continuing through the end of 1st or 2nd grade, an instructional assistant supported individual and small groups of students while their teacher provided direct instruction.

Conclusion

Grades K-2 are crucial years for preparing the groundwork of alphabetics, phonemic awareness, and phonics. When this foundation has been poorly laid, students require years of intervention to undo the mislearning and become proficient readers. Even when classroom teachers lacked knowledge in specific aspects of English, students benefited from the activities and repeated practice available in the scope and sequence of High Quality Instructional Materials. In Mississippi I found educators who believed all students could and should learn to read, and that this responsibility was theirs, because their students' futures and freedoms depended on learning to read well.

**“It would be educational malpractice
to miss opportunities to
meet their needs.”**

– Ashanti Barnes, Principal,
Van Winkle Early Childhood Center



Classroom Door
at Hazlehurst
Elementary
School

Improving Reading Performance:

My deepest gratitude to the International Dyslexia Association and IDA-NNEA Board of Directors and the Newsletter Committee for their dedication to all students and their support of this research.



Special thanks to Dr. Kathleen Grigsby of the Jackson School District and Bethani Welch of the MS-DOE.

The full report, executive summary, and this slideshow will be available next week at dyslexiaida-nnea.org.

What Northern New England Can Learn from Mississippi