

New Initiatives 2026

Growing Success Through Strong Attendance

Summer 2026

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Vision

Every student is prepared for success.

Mission

To build a world-class education system that equips every student with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college, careers, and life in Mississippi and the world.

Strategic Plan Goals

- 1** Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program and is prepared for kindergarten
- 2** Every student develops strong literacy and mathematics skills in all grades
- 3** Every student graduates prepared for success in college, career, or military service
- 4** Every school and district demonstrates strong academic outcomes and continuous improvement
- 5** Every school is fully staffed with qualified, effective teachers and leaders
- 6** All students attend schools and districts with safe, engaging, and supportive environments

Objectives

New Initiatives

- Understand the requirements of Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law- MS Code §37-13-91
- Identify district responsibilities related to attendance monitoring
- Examine required timelines for intervention efforts
- Ensure districts understand compliance with MDE attendance reporting regulations

School Attendance Reporting

SAO Portal

MDE is required to have a uniformed way for districts to report absences.

MDE has been receiving referrals via email or hand delivered.

MDE now has a SAO Portal that all districts will be using in the 2026-2027 school year. [SAO Portal](#)

SAO's also have an updated database to enter referrals (PowerApp)

Attendance Reporting Codes

Uniform reporting

MDE has monitored data and have discovered that attendance is being recorded differently all over the state.

The OCSAE&DOP is working towards uniformed state-wide attendance recording.

"Cheat Sheets"- SAM & PowerSchool and how they are tied to MSIS.

Training for attendance clerks

Attendance Law Revisions

MS Code §37-13-91 effective July 1, 2026

SAO Pay Increase

Certificate of Enrollment due by **August 15** of each year

Required attendance of 66% of student's school day

No more than 5 excused absences per semester unless specifically approved by the superintendent or designee

No school sanctioned event counted as absence

Districts develop and implement tiered intervention strategies – parent contact at 3 absences, interventions by 8 absences

Unlawful absences must be reported by the end of the next business day

Attendance Law Revisions

MS Code §37-13-91- Short Version

- An unlawful absence is any time a compulsory-school-age student (ages 5-17) (5 year olds turning 6 on or before Sept 1st or enrolling in a full time public Kindergarten program) missing 33% of the student's school day, or all of a school day without a valid excuse.
- **An absence is not considered unlawful until the student fails to present an excuse in accordance with district policy. (i.e. if policy allows a student two days to submit an excuse, therefore, referral is not valid until that timeframe has expired.)**
- Suspensions are considered unexcused absences under state law; however, they must be reported at the time they occur to ensure they are not incorrectly counted toward truancy by the SAO.

Attendance Law Revisions

MS Code 37-13-191

- Superintendents must report to the SAO if a student has not enrolled within 15 days of beginning of school.
- No valid excuse = unlawful absence.

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2	Primary School - BriDgeIT																																										
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13	9	Joseph	B	CAT1	A	P		A	P	A	P	A	A	A	A		A	P	A	A	A	P		A	A	P	A	A	P		A	A	P	A	P	A	A		P	A	P	A	P
14	10	Joe	B	CAT2	P	A		P	A	P	P	P	P	P	A		P	A	P	A	P	P		A	P	P	A	P	P		P	P	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	
15	11	Nikkie	G	CAT2	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P						
16	12	Ponty	B	CAT2	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	P	A						
17	13	Park	B	CAT4	A	A	A	A	P	P	A	A	P	A	P	A	A	A	A	A	A	P	A	A	P	A	A	A	A	P	A	A	P	A	A	P	A						
18	14	Ronald	B	CAT4	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P						
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21	17	Bratt	B	CAT1	P	A	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A						
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Attendance Reporting

MS Code §37-13-91

3 absences: The school must contact the parent or guardian.

5 Unlawful absences: The school must report to the school attendance officer.

8 or more unlawful absences: This can lead to a referral to court for truancy. The school must have interventions for the student. The school must also report to the school attendance officer.

12 unlawful absences- Must be reported to the school attendance officer.

15 unlawful absences – Must be reported to the school attendance officer and will be filed in court if interventions have been documented.

Attendance Referral

FLOW CHART

3

3 Absences (excused or unexcused)

- School contacts parent/guardian
- Document Communication



5

5 Unlawful Absences

- Submit referral to School Attendance Officer
- Begin school-based interventions
- Document all contacts and interventions



8

8 Unlawful Absences

- Submit Referral to School Attendance Officer
- Continue and strengthen interventions
- Share intervention documentation with the SAO



12

12 Unlawful Absences

- Submit referral to School Attendance Officer
- Review effectiveness of Intervention
- Continue family engagement and supports



15

15 Unlawful Absences

- Submit referral to School Attendance Officer
- Provide complete intervention documentation

Submit referrals for every 5 unlawful absences

Example: 20, 25, 30

Attendance Law Revisions

MS Code §37-13-91 effective July 1, 2026

8 unlawful absences, school shall establish prima facie case that the parent is responsible and has refused or willfully failed to perform the duties imposed.

SAO must have promptly contacted the home of the child and has provided written notice to the parent, guardian, or custodian.

SAO **cannot** file in court unless the school has implemented interventions and contacted the family.

SAO will file in court once all attempts have been made to secure enrollment or attendance

Attendance Law Revisions

MS Code §37-13-91

Students are limited to five excused absences per semester unless approved by the Superintendent or designee as extenuating circumstances

Medical documentation required after the third day of illness related absences

Medical and dental appointments require provider documentation

Unapproved absences beyond the limit are considered unexcused

New Initiatives

Goals

- Strengthen attendance monitoring and intervention efforts
- Improve student engagement and reduce chronic absenteeism
- Ensure compliance with updated compulsory attendance law
- Reduce chronic absenteeism statewide
- Improve student attendance and engagement
- Increase collaboration between schools, families, and communities
- Strengthen compliance and accountability practices
- Support districts with consistent reporting and accountability

Improved Attendance Reporting

Goals

- Uniform statewide attendance reporting expectations (SAO Portal) All districts should be trained by December 1, 2026.
- Enhanced district accountability measures
- Focus on accurate and timely MSIS reporting- Common codes for SAM and PowerSchool
- Increased training and technical assistance for districts by OCSAE&DOP

Chronic Absenteeism

Legislative Updates

- Revised Miss. Code Ann. §37-13-91 effective July 1, 2026
- Districts required to actively monitor chronic absenteeism
- Chronic absenteeism data included in accountability and school improvement plans
- Locally tailored attendance policies required by November 1, 2026
- Monitor attendance by school, grade level, and subgroup
- Track students absent 10% or more of enrolled days
- Use Early Warning System (EWS) indicators
- Provide timely interventions for at-risk students

Early Warning System

Use what you have

- Use Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance indicators
- Identify students as On Track, Sliding, or Off Track
- Strengthen collaboration with MTSS and Teacher Support Teams
- Use structured intervention and follow-up processes
- Highly recommended to have local and district attendance teams to monitor at risk students monthly. Teams should include at a minimum, school attendance officer, court personnel, and counselors, as well as appropriate district personnel.

Required Intervention Strategies

Goals

- Notify parents when students accumulate three or more absences
- Conduct parent conferences to identify attendance barriers
- Provide referrals to counseling, health, and transportation services
- Develop individualized attendance success plans for at-risk students

District Accountability and Compliance

Goals

- Districts must report unlawful absences within required timelines
- Attendance reporting must follow uniform MDE procedures
- Failure to comply may impact accreditation status
- Annual reviews and documentation required for compliance monitoring

District Requirements

Interventions

Locally Tailored District Policies

- Set standards for excused absence documentation
- Establish parent communication and engagement protocols
- Implement attendance success plans for students at risk
- Ensure policies are reviewed and updated every three years

Family and Community Engagement

- Provide multilingual and multi-channel communication
- Conduct parent conferences for attendance concerns
- Partner with community organizations and local supports
- Increase outreach through schools and attendance officers

Research

Research on Chronic Absenteeism

Root Causes- Data

- Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year. Half the students who miss 2-4 days in September likely miss nearly a month of school.
- Poor attendance is one influence on reading proficiency.

Research on Chronic Absenteeism

Root causes- Data

- By 6th grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
- Students who live in communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent than others often for reasons beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation and a lack of access to health care.

Research on Chronic Absenteeism

Root Causes- Data

- When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating.
- Attendance improves when schools engage students and parents in positive ways and when schools provide mentors for chronically absent students.

Uncovering Root Causes for Absenteeism

Root Causes of Absenteeism

DATA

After looking at data, we have discovered that reasons for chronic absenteeism is different among communities across the state.



Barriers

Root Causes

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Poor transportation
- Housing or food insecurity
- Lack of access to needed services
- System Involvement
- Impact of trauma and/or violence in the community

Aversion

Root Causes

- Struggling Academically or Behaviorally
- Unwelcoming School Climate
- Social and Peer Challenges
- Unfair Disciplinary and Suspension Practices
- Undiagnosed Disability and/or Disability Accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experience

Disengagement

Root Causes

- Lack of challenging, engaging instruction
- Boredom
- No meaningful relationship with adults or peers
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic or behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Work conflicts with high school

Key Findings

Survey Results

The Mississippi Department of Education distributed a survey to its transformation districts as part of a statewide effort to better understand and support student attendance. Using a “trusted third party,” the survey gathered insights from staff members who work closely with students, including those youth experiencing attendance challenges.

Key Findings

Survey results

- Lack of relevance to student's future(57.1%)
- Family responsibilities (57.1%)
- Housing instability (41.6%)
- Respondents reported attendance challenges most often occur on Monday/Fridays (50.6%)
- Many absences suggest students are spending unstructured time at home, working, or managing caregiver responsibilities.

Key Findings

Survey Results

Other related Barriers to attendance:

- Academic Struggles (45.5%)
- Lack of belonging or connections (26%)
- Other (parent involvement, parent attitudes towards education, and parent accountability (16%))
- Bullying or safety concerns (6.5%)

Key Findings

Survey Results

Respondents emphasized the following to increase student interest and motivation for attendance:

- Increasing relevance of learning
- Using incentives
- Creating stronger family partnership
- Improving parent engagement around daily attendance
- Creating a welcoming school climate via adult-student relationship

Strategies for Schools

Start with a Team

Strategies for Schools

1. Select an Administrative Leader and Members
2. Take a school-wide, tiered approach
3. Engage in Professional Development

Know which students are chronically absent

Strategies for Schools

- Rely on real-time actionable student data to identify students
- Data will highlight when progress is made



Learn why students are missing school

Strategies for Schools

- Uncover Root Causes for Absences
- Design School Wide Targeted Interventions
- Align Interventions with actual barriers students and families have identified to be effective
- Solutions grounded in lived experiences will be more likely to remove obstacles and make a lasting impact on student attendance

Use a Tiered Attendance Improvement Strategy

Strategies for Schools

1. Start with Prevention- Tier 1
2. Layer on Interventions that address root causes-Tier 2 and Tier 3.
3. Monitor whether you should adopt, adapt, or abandon strategies and interventions.

3 Tiers of Intervention

Strategies for Schools

Tier 1: Universal Prevention

Strategies are aimed at encouraging better attendance for all students and preventing absenteeism before it affects achievement.

Tier 2: Early Intervention

Interventions are designed to remove barriers to attendance for students at greater risk of chronic absenteeism. These students and families should receive personalized attention as part of the engagement strategy.

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

Interventions provide intensive support to students missing the most school. Might require other agencies, such as, health, housing and social services. Students missing at least 20% of the school year can benefit from this level of support.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

The Three Tier Instructional Model is part of State Board Policy 41.1 This model is designed by MDE to meet the needs of every student and consists of three tiers of instruction:

MTSS is.....	MTSS is not.....
A framework for supporting student improvement in both academics and behavior	A single curriculum or program
For ALL students including those who need enrichment	Just for struggling students
Flexible to meet the unique needs of districts and schools	A one-size fits all prescription
Data-informed and evidence based	Based on assumptions
A collaborating team of individuals working together to solve problems	The responsibility of one person
A framework for making decisions regarding interventions, or the need for increased supports/services	A pre-referral process for special education

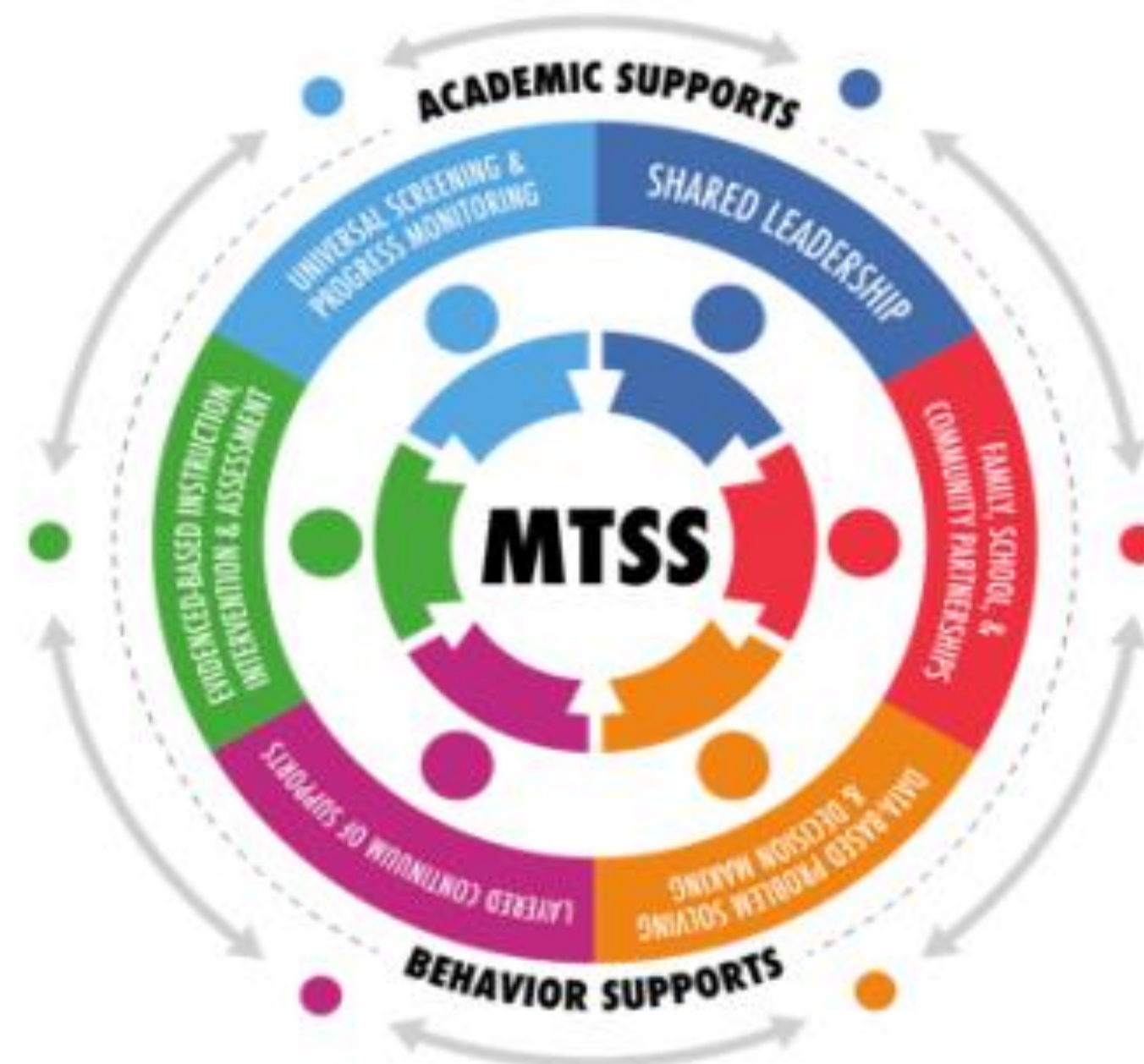
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

The Three Tier Instructional Model is part of State Board Policy 41.1 This model is designed by MDE to meet the needs of every student and consists of three tiers of instruction:

Tier 1: Quality classroom instruction based on Mississippi standards

Tier 2: Focused supplemental instruction

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention



Opportunities for Action

Opportunities for Action

Resources

Qualitative Data - Attendance Works

- Empathy Interviews to learn from lived experiences
- 2X10 Relationship Building
- Student Focus Groups
- Student Surveys to find out the whys
- Shadow a Student to see the school through the student's eyes

Opportunities for Action

Resources

Engage families of students in grades K–3 through attendance messaging, mentoring, and recognition programs to reinforce positive attendance habits.

Distribute information about the importance of school attendance around your communities. Examples include pediatrician's office, barber shops and grocery stores.

Make flyers with your school's attendance policy and distribute at Open House Nights or any other community related event.

Opportunities for Action

Resources

- Build partnerships with health care providers, provide flexibility for families facing extenuating circumstances, and establish outreach systems to re-engage students quickly.
- Encourage personal outreach from teachers and staff when students are absent to communicate that each student's presence is valued and essential.
- Promote collaboration and the sharing of effective practices across districts to replicate strategies proven to reduce absenteeism.

Scan of Environment and Attendance Tool (SEAT)

Opportunities for Action

- School climate is made of several elements:
 - The school's physical environment;
 - Arrangements that contribute to people's sense of physical and emotional safety;
- Response to the quality of teaching and learning;
- The presence or absence of healthy relationships between adults and students

Action Steps

Supports

Escalation Pathway

3 absences puts a student at risk	
Notify	Contact the parent or guardian
Problem Solve	Identify barriers
Support	Connect the student and family to supports Use an attendance success plan

Action Steps

Interventions

5 Unlawful Absences

Report	By the end of the next business day
Start MTSS	Implement Attendance Interventions
Document	Develop and monitor attendance plan Document interventions and family engagement efforts

Action

Supports

8 unlawful absences or failure to engage with attendance plans

Consider Intermediary Intervention	The district may refer parent or child to an approved third-party restorative attendance or behavior intervention before going to court Use this step only after MTSS interventions have been fully implemented and documented If used, completion should be verified in writing by the third-party program.

Action

Final

Continued nonattendance after intervention, or intervention not completed

Refer to court	Court referral may follow if nonattendance continues after the intermediary intervention, or if the intervention is not completed.
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Action

Final step

15 unlawful missed school days after prior measures

The school attendance officer shall file a petition. The school attendance officer cannot file unless recorded interventions have been implemented for the student and family.

Closing

The 3 R's Every Student Needs in the Classroom

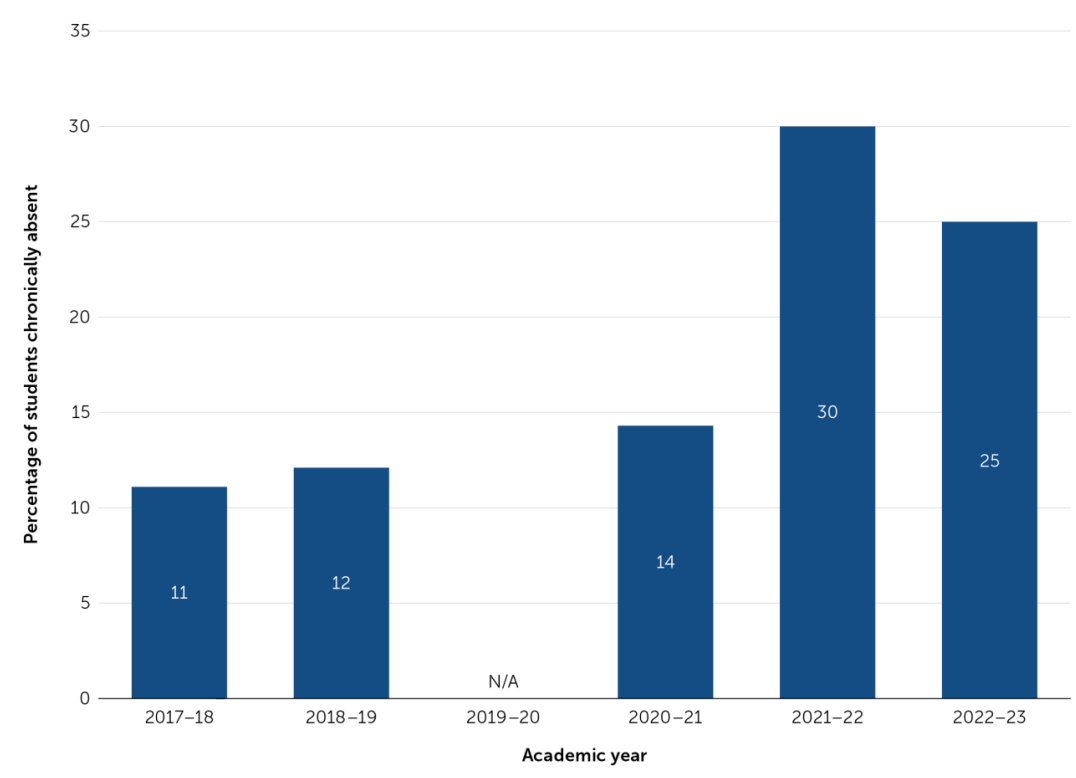
Closing

- Relevance- Learning connects to real life and student's interests.
- Rigor- Challenging work that pushes students to grow academically.
- Relationships- Positive connections with teachers and peers' supports learning.

Closing

Chronic Absenteeism

Mississippi’s chronic absenteeism challenge remains significant. However, through focused strategies, early intervention, data-driven decision-making, and shared best practices, districts can make sustained progress toward ensuring that every student remains connected, supported, and on track for academic success.



References

Information

Attendance Works

Mississippi Department of Education

New Initiatives 2026

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