



**Special Review Team Report  
Montgomery Public Schools  
Montgomery, Alabama**

**Dates of Review:  
March 19-21, 2018**

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# Special Review Report

## Introduction

AdvancED received notification that the Montgomery County Public Schools System (MPS) experienced substantive changes since its most recent onsite External Review in 2013 when the district achieved AdvancED Systems Accreditation. As a result of the Alabama State Board of Education (ALSDE) System Intervention in February 2017, administrative control of Montgomery Public Schools was taken over by ALSDE. This action resulted in a substantive change in the day-to-day operations of the school system, prompting AdvancED to conduct a Special Review of the district on March 19 – 21, 2018.

According to AdvancED Policy II: Term and Requirements of Accreditation (2.02), schools and school systems must adhere and comply with applicable governmental requirements and report to AdvancED occurrence of any substantive change in the school/school system, which changes the scope and/or has an impact on the school's/school system's ability to meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies. The purpose of the AdvancED Special Review for the Montgomery County Public Schools System focused on the impact of the substantive changes experienced by MPS in relation to the requirements for accreditation.

Based on the findings presented in this report, AdvancED may conduct future onsite Monitoring Reviews to ensure that progress is being made by the Montgomery Public Schools System relative to the Improvement Priorities identified by the Special Review Team. Under AdvancED policy, Special Review and Monitoring Review Teams may make accreditation recommendations based upon evidence obtained during such reviews.

## Activities of the Special Review Team

The Special Review Team consisted of six educators trained to conduct AdvancED Special Reviews. In preparation for the onsite review, the Special Review Team conducted various conference calls with appropriate leaders from AdvancED and the Montgomery County Public Schools System to gain a deeper understanding of the school system. The Lead Evaluator of the Special Review Team worked closely with designated contact persons from the Montgomery County Public Schools System to plan the review schedule, organize the stakeholder interviews and arrange three onsite school visits.

The key focus of the Special Review was on the:

- Issues identified as the basis for State Intervention (Student Achievement, Fiscal Performance and Governing Effectiveness)
- Impact on the Accreditation Standards (Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity and Resource Capacity)

Therefore, once onsite at the Montgomery County Public Schools System, the Special Review Team engaged in activities aligned to the purpose and focus of the Special Review. The activities included:

- Interviews with the Board of Education, district leadership and school principals
- Classroom observations using eLeot as conducted during school visits to Wares Ferry Elementary, Baldwin Arts and Academics Middle Magnet School, and George Washington Carver High School
- Artifact reviews, including
  - Governance policies
  - Email correspondences
  - MPS website, ALSDE website (System Intervention)
  - Organization charts
  - MPS Strategic Plan 2022
  - Assessment data
  - District and school report cards
  - Class Measures District Review Report
  - News media articles
  - Financial documentation
  - Board meeting video recordings
- Team deliberations and report preparation

### **Special Review Report**

The Special Review Team reviewed information and evidence related to the areas of governance, teaching and learning, and finances/resources. The findings of the Special Review Team, as presented in this report, are evaluated through the *AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems*, AdvancED Accreditation Policies and Assurances. The report provides Improvement Priorities that require decisive corrective action on the part of the Montgomery County Public Schools System within timeframes prescribed herein.

Under the authority of the State Board of Education and the former State Superintendent of Education, the following events occurred:

- **February 9, 2017** – The Alabama State Board of Education voted unanimously to intervene into the entire district of Montgomery Public Schools. The key components of the state intervention are improving organizational culture, operations and efficiency. The intervention is set to take place in five phases between 2017 and 2022.
- **Fall 2017** – Montgomery Public Schools requested permission from AdvancED to reschedule the Accreditation Engagement Review from the spring of 2018 to the spring of 2019. The request was granted by AdvancED.
- **January 16, 2018** – Montgomery Public Schools received a letter of notice from AdvancED stating that as a result of the administrative control assumed by the Alabama State Board of Education and the substantive change in the day-to-day operations of the district, a Special Review would be held in March 2018. The purpose of the Special Review would focus on the impact of the substantive changes experienced by MPS in relation to the requirements for accreditation.



- **January 30, 2018** – By invitation, Dr. Mark Elgart, President/CEO, AdvancED, provided a detailed presentation to the Montgomery County Board of Education during a special called board meeting. The presentation encompassed information about AdvancED, expectations for the Special Review, and a question and answer opportunity. Dr. Elgart emphasized that the pending Special Review would focus on the:
  - Basis for State Intervention (Student Achievement, Fiscal Performance and Governing Effectiveness)
  - Impact on the Accreditation Standards (Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity and Resource Capacity)

### **AdvancED Standards Diagnostic Results**

The AdvancED Performance Standards Diagnostic was used by the Special Review Team to evaluate the district's effectiveness based on the *AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems*. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity and Resource Capacity**. Point values are established within the diagnostic and a percentage of the points earned by the institution for each Standard is calculated from the point values for each Standard. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors representing Needs Improvement (Red), Emerging (Yellow), Meets Expectations (Green) and Exceeds Expectations (Blue). The results for Montgomery Public Schools for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

The Special Review Report provides the ratings on all of the AdvancED Performance Standards. Although there are many Standards rated at the "Needs Improvement" level, not all of those Standards were brought forward as Improvement Priorities. The six Improvement Priorities cited by the Special Review Team encompass the most critical, initial findings for Montgomery Public Schools. The district must address and document progress in each of the identified Improvement Priorities.

AdvancED will conduct Monitoring Review(s) during 2018 – 19 to evaluate the system's progress in preparation for the pending Accreditation Engagement Review in spring 2019. Although there are only six Improvement Priorities cited in this report, the system also must give serious consideration, discussion and action regarding all of the Standard ratings.

### **Leadership Capacity Domain**

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction; the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives; the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways; and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

The Leadership Capacity Domain ratings for the Montgomery County Public Schools System are as provided in the Leadership Capacity Standards table below.

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
<b>1.1</b>	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.2</b>	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learners.	Emerging
<b>1.3</b>	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.4</b>	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.5</b>	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.6</b>	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.7</b>	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.8</b>	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.	Emerging
<b>1.9</b>	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.10</b>	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.	Needs Improvement
<b>1.11</b>	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.	Needs Improvement

## Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning is the primary expectation of every system and its institutions. The establishment of a learning culture built on high expectations for learning, along with quality programs and services, which include an analysis of results, are all key indicators of the system's impact on teaching and learning.

The Learning Capacity Domain ratings for the Montgomery County Public Schools System are as provided in the Learning Capacity Standards table below.

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	Needs Improvement
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Needs Improvement
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.	Meets Expectations
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.	Needs Improvement
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Emerging
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices.	Emerging
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	Emerging
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.	Emerging
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	Emerging
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Emerging
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	Emerging
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	Emerging



### Resource Capacity Domain

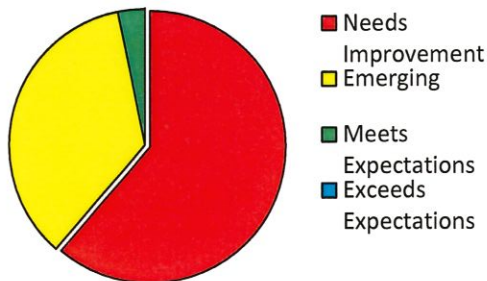
The use and distribution of resources align and support the needs of the system and institutions served. A system ensures that resources are aligned with its stated purpose and direction and distributed equitably so that the needs of the system are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes support for professional learning for all staff. The system examines the allocation and use of resources to ensure appropriate levels of funding, sustainability, and system effectiveness.

The Resource Capacity Domain ratings for the Montgomery County Public Schools System are as provided in the Resource Capacity Standards table below.

Resource Capacity Standards		Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.	Emerging
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.	Needs Improvement
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.	Needs Improvement
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.	Needs Improvement
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement

## Ratings Overview

The chart below provides an overview of the institutional ratings across the three Domains.



Rating	Number of Standards
Needs Improvement	19
Emerging	11
Meets Expectations	1
Exceeds Expectations	0

## Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) Results

The eleot is a learner-centric classroom observation tool that is composed of 28 items organized in seven environments aligned with the AdvancED Standards. The eleot provides useful, relevant, structured, and quantifiable data on the extent to which students are engaged in activities and/or demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and/or dispositions that are conducive to effective learning. Classroom observations are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes. Results from eleot are reported on a scale of one to four based on the degree and quality of the engagement.

Very Evident 4	Evident 3	Somewhat Evident 2	Not Observed 1
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The eleot scores shown are representative of twenty classroom observations that were conducted during the Special Review. Please refer to Improvement Priority 4 for additional details regarding the eleot ratings.

eleot® Observations	
Total Number of eleot Observations	20
Environments	Rating
Equitable Learning Environment	2.39
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	1.75
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology and support	2.55
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.10



<b>eleot® Observations</b>	
<b>Total Number of eleot Observations</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Environments</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Learners demonstrate and/or have opportunities to develop empathy/respect/appreciation for differences in abilities, aptitudes, backgrounds, cultures, and/or other human characteristics, conditions, and dispositions	2.15
<b>High Expectations Environment</b>	2.08
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.35
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	2.05
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	1.90
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	1.95
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	2.15
<b>Supportive Learning Environment</b>	2.53
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged and purposeful	2.40
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	2.30
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers, and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	2.65
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	2.75
<b>Active Learning Environment</b>	2.06
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.15
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.00
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	2.15
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	1.95
<b>Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment</b>	2.23
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	1.95
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	2.50
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	2.50
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	1.95
<b>Well-Managed Learning Environment</b>	3.06
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.25
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.25
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	2.80
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	2.95

eleot® Observations	
Total Number of eleot Observations	20
Environments	Rating
Digital Learning Environment	1.12
Learners use digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate and/or use information for learning	1.20
Learners use digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems and/or create original works for learning	1.10
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.05

## Findings

Based upon the information collected and reviewed, the Special Review Team found sufficient evidence to support a finding that the institution is in violation of Advanced Standards and Policies.

Results from the Special Review are reported in four ratings represented by colors. These ratings provide guidance and insight into an institution's current performance-level for each of the Standards and Policies identified for an Improvement Priority.

Rating	Description
Needs Improvement	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts
Emerging	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Meets Expectations	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards
Exceeds Expectations	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations



**Performance Level Rating: Leadership Capacity**

Leadership Capacity Standard		Score
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Needs Improvement

**Improvement Priority 1:**

**Review, revise, and comply with all board policies and state laws.**

**Evidence:**

Policy review, revision, development and adoption are primary duties of Boards of Education. MPS Policy BBAB (School Board Operations – Duties) states the Board:

3. Determines policy for the operation of the schools;
4. Adopts rules and regulations governing the operation of the schools.

Policy BBBA (School Board Operations – Duties) states that “The duties and obligations of an individual Board member shall include the following:

- B. To become familiar with the Federal and State School Laws, the State Department of Education rules and regulations, Board policies, rules, and regulations.
- I. To comply with all statutory requirements, State and Local Board policies and regulations of duly authorized administrative agencies.”

Policy BDA (School Board Operations – Policy Development Systems) states that “the Board of Education shall, upon the written recommendation of the Superintendent, determine and establish a written educational policy for the Board of Education and its employees and shall prescribe rules and regulations for the conduct and management of the schools.”

Review of current policies on the MPS website revealed numerous outdated policies. Interviews revealed there was no recent schedule of policy development and review. In addition, no staff is designated to provide guidance, support or direction for policy review by the Board. The MPS Board has not systematically updated its policies to reflect the current practices and procedures governing the school system. Interviews revealed that due to the state intervention, policy review and development will be under the responsibility of the Intervention Team.

The MPS Strategic Plan 2022, Phase I, Goal 1, states the following:

“The major goal of the state’s intervention into MPS is to transform the organization into a High Reliable Organization (an organization preoccupied with avoiding failure of its chief mission) and High Performance Organization (HPO) (an organization that achieves rigorous outcomes over five years through a disciplined focus on a few key



priorities). MPS will be fiscally and operationally sound, function coherently, and will significantly improve internal and external stakeholder satisfaction and perception.”

Strategy 1 focuses on the development and implementation of new MPS district-level systems and processes. The Strategic Plan 2022 stated that the creation of an MPS Intervention Policy Manual was to be completed in April 2018. The measurable outcome as stated in the MPS Strategic Plan 2022 is “the completion of an actual policy manual” in April 2018.

The Montgomery County Improvement Plan (MCIP) stated that the Alabama State Department of Education support team initiated the review and revision of the district policy manual. MPS is currently in the process of policy review in preparation to present to the Board in the summer, 2018.

MPS Policy BAA (School Board Operations – Goals and Objectives) reflects the mission, vision, and belief statements from 2005 yet documentation from the district’s website displays the current purpose and direction statements as well as belief statements.

See the MPS website for policy.

(<http://www.mps.k12.al.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=548543>)

<b>SECTION:</b> SCHOOL BOARD OPERATIONS	<b>CODE:</b> BAA	<b>ISSUE DATE</b> 11/22/05	<b>CURRENT PURPOSE AND DIRECTION STATEMENT</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION TERM:</b> Goals and Objectives	<b>RESCINDS:</b> BAA	<b>ISSUED:</b> 1/27/94	
<b>Mission Statement</b> All schools will be safe and caring communities where teachers teach and all students learn at higher levels.			<b>Mission:</b> We will engage, educate and inspire our students to succeed in college, career and beyond.
<b>Vision Statement</b> One focus ... Preparing Students for Life			<b>Vision:</b> MPS is a place where every student develops a love of learning, cultivates intellectual curiosity, and dreams of a future full of amazing possibilities.

Policy ABCD (School District Organization – Method of Election) articulates that board members will be elected to serve six-year, staggered terms. Interviews, as well as expiration terms listed on the district’s website, stated that board members now serve a four-year term.

See the MPS website for policy.

(<http://www.mps.k12.al.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=548541>)

<b>SECTION:</b> SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION	<b>CODE:</b> ABCD	<b>ISSUE DATE</b> 11/21/89
<b>DESCRIPTION TERM:</b> Method of Election	<b>RESCINDS:</b> ABCD	<b>ISSUED:</b> 1/83
The Montgomery Public Schools operate as a single unit of administration, inasmuch as city and county schools were combined under one Board of Education in 1928. There are seven districts represented by individuals who are elected to serve six-year, staggered terms.		
Ref: Alabama Code 16-8-2		

A local constitutional amendment, Act 2011-257, adopted for Montgomery County at the November 2, 2012, general election, states "As terms of office on the Montgomery County Board of Education expire, new members ***shall be elected*** to the board for terms of four years." Alabama legislation provides specific laws to guide county school boards in their roles and responsibilities. The purpose of the *School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012*, Chapter 290-1-5, is to "enhance the effectiveness of public education governance in Alabama."

*The Code of Alabama 1975*, Title 16, § 16-1-30, articulates the following regarding the written educational policies, rules and regulations of local boards of education:

(b) The local board of education shall, upon the written recommendation of the chief executive officer, determine and establish a written educational policy for the board of education and its employees and shall prescribe rules and regulations for the conduct and management of the schools. The written policies, rules, and regulations, so established, adopted, or promulgated shall be made available to all persons affected and employed by the board. Any amendments to the policies, rules, and regulations shall be developed in the same manner and furnished to the affected persons employed by the board within 20 days after adoption.

The Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) Boardmanship Series, School Board Member Ethics, Third Edition (2003) states in the Code of Ethics that the board of education will (The list below is not quoted in its entirety.):

- Recognize that I should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings;
- Render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups;
- Work with other board members to establish effective board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent.

A joint publication, *School Boards and Superintendents: Roles and Responsibilities (2017)*, by the Alabama Association of School Boards and the School Superintendents of Alabama

articulates updated statements crafted as a set of guidelines to provide school boards and superintendents parameters as to their roles and responsibilities. Regarding the roles and responsibilities that pertain to policy, the publication states that the board of education “establishes expected outcomes through policy” while the Superintendent “ensures policies are current and are properly implemented.”

The publication articulates specific actions for the school board and the superintendent regarding school board policies.

**The Board**

1. Adopts policies for the governance and management of the system;
2. Focuses policies on desired outcomes rather than administrative procedures;
3. Reviews and revises policies on a regular basis.

**The Superintendent**

1. Advises the board regarding policy development and revision;
2. Drafts proposed policies and provides the board with sufficient data and information to debate the recommendation;
3. Makes recommendations that are consistent with board policy.

MPS Policy BBBC (School Board Operations – Board Member Development Opportunities) states, “the Board shall conduct an annual self-study in the spring to evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness in the following areas:

1. Relationship with Superintendent
2. Community Relationship
3. Board Meetings
4. Staff and Personnel Relationships
5. Relationship to Instructional Program
6. Relationship to Financial Management of the Schools
7. Personal Qualities
8. Other”

The policy further explains that once the self-study has concluded, the Board will discuss the detailed results and formulate objectives for the ensuing year. “Objectives shall be stated in the form of behavioral or productivity modifications to be achieved.” There was no evidence to support the Board’s compliance with this policy in recent years.

**Rationale:**

The AASB Boardmanship Series, *The School Board President’s Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2007), provides guidance to school board presidents and boards regarding policy development (See Leading Policy Development, p. 19). The school board “sets the goals, standards, and philosophy by which the schools are to be run ... the business of the board is not to run the schools but to see that they are run well.” This is accomplished through policy development under the critical leadership of the board president. School board policies should be a component of the regular school board agenda so that policy review, revisions, and development take place systemically and systematically. AASB further states that a school

board can choose to have a policy committee or act as a “committee of the whole.” Additionally, AASB states the school board should appoint the superintendent as the policy coordinator. “Policy development is best approached as a team effort of the board and superintendent (p.19).”

School boards that operate under outdated policies and without a policy review process, tend to make poor decisions under crisis which can subsequently create legal liability issues. This behavior causes loss of focus, divisiveness, lack of communication and ultimately loss of public trust. When school boards focus on policies to guide the operations of the school system and implement a well-defined policy review and development protocol, their decisions and actions are based on new, updated, and current policies that serve as a guide to positive change.

### Directives:

1. Collaborate with the State Intervention Team, MPS superintendent, and MPS district level staff to conduct and document a policy audit.
2. Collaborate with the State Intervention Team, MPS superintendent and MPS district level staff to develop and document a policy review, revision, and adoption schedule/timeline in compliance with board policy.
3. Ensure that all school board policies are aligned to state laws.
4. Identify and document the structure of the policy committee and policy coordinator.
5. Include and document policy review, revision, development, and adoption decisions on the regular board and work session agendas.

### Performance Level Rating: Leadership Capacity

Leadership Capacity Standard		Score
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Needs Improvement

### Improvement Priority 2:

**Develop, document, implement, and adhere to a code of ethics policy which defines the specific roles and responsibilities for members of a school board.**

### Evidence:

The Montgomery Public Schools Board of Education Policy BBBA (School Board Operations - Duties) states that “The duties and obligations of an individual Board member shall include the following (The list below is not quoted in its entirety.):

- F. To represent the Board in such a way as to promote public interest in and support for Board-related activities;
- H. To recognize that frank discussions based on objective rationale are vital to the



- ultimate success of the School District;
- J. To act ethically in all matters at all times thereby representing the school system to the best of one's ability."

MPS Policy BBBA was issued on February 2, 1997. Although the policy states the duties and obligations of individual board members, it does not reflect any revisions since the last issue date. Regarding the ethical behavior of board members, the current policy states that board members are to "act ethically, in all matters at all times thereby representing the School District to best of one's ability." There was no evidence of a Code of Ethics or guidelines detailing expectations for appropriate behavior and professional decorum. Board Policies BH (Ethics) and BHA (Conflict of Interest) were not found on the district's website. There was no documentation explaining the absence of these two policies although they were listed in the table of contents (B – School Board Operations).

(<http://www.mps.k12.al.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=548543>)

Video of some board members' display of disrespectful words, behavior and actions, was evident in multiple recorded board meetings. The November 14, 2017, Board of Education meeting included discussions between board members regarding the information item presentation on race and equity in the lottery for the magnet school programs. Following an intense discussion between board members, the body gestures of one of the board members included raised hands stating, "I give up." Towards the end of the discussion, a board member made a sarcastic statement and facial expression.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJwoWMeCcqk> )

The October 24, 2017, board meeting included a presentation of the financial audit followed by questions by board members. During the question and answer period, some board members' voice tones appeared loud and defensive. When a staff member in the audience was answering a question regarding credit card purchases, several board members began talking at the same time. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQOT4mMLsw4>)

The October 26, 2017, Budget Hearing II and Special Called board meeting included stakeholders' comments from the audience regarding the potential sale of Georgia Washington Middle School and board members responses. Two board members spoke in negative tones towards a stakeholder during the meeting. Back and forth "emotional" comments were exchanged between stakeholders in the audience and a board member. A board member responded to a stakeholder's accusatory statement by saying, "And maybe you're grinding your ax 'cause you're not getting the money for the teachers that are placed in the school you have put friends and family! Boom!" The board president attempted to restore order to the meeting. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bztVq-3tGwo&t=6968s>)

The February 13, 2018, board meeting included discussions regarding the recommendation for a law firm on a contractual basis for the school system. A board member expressed concerns about the recommendation of the law firm due to pending legal conflicts. As questions and responses occurred back and forth between board members, there appeared to be confusion

as to the proper protocol regarding the “motion on the floor.” When the board president asked for a vote on the motion, three board members raised their hands in favor of the motion. A fourth board member was reminded of the voting taking place followed by a raised hand from that board member. After the four board members raised their hands in support of the motion, another board member commented, “Well, there you go.” Three board members voted in opposition to the motion. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6YqBJ--k9I>)

Recorded board meeting videos reviewed by the Special Review Team displayed good video quality but the audio quality of some recordings was substandard. During many board meetings, board members and audience members stated they could not hear what the speaker was saying. The straight line seating arrangement of the board members was not conducive to facilitate eye contact and discussions with each other during meetings. Board members had to lean over or lean back to look at other board members. When taking a vote, the board president had to lean forward to count votes of the other board members.

The purpose of the *School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012*, Chapter 290-1-5, is to “enhance the effectiveness of public education governance in Alabama.” Regarding the Code of Conduct, the rules provide “a code of conduct for each member of a local board of education in order to better ensure that any decision or action of a local board of education is based on the interests of students or the school system ...”

Chapter 290-1-5-.03 Code of Conduct specifies:

- “(1) The State Board of Education shall adopt a model code of conduct for members of local boards of education before January 1, 2013. The model code of conduct shall be designed to better ensure that any decision or action by a local board of education is based on the best interests of the students and local school system, without self-interest. The State Board of Education may periodically adopt revisions to the model code of conduct as it deems necessary.
- (2) Before April 1, 2013, each local board of education shall adopt a code of conduct that includes, at a minimum, the model code of conduct adopted by the State Board of Education.
- (3) Within three months after adoption of any revisions to the model code of conduct by the State Board of Education, each local board of education shall incorporate the revisions into its code of conduct.”

*The Code of Ethics For School Board Members* published by the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) states that the local school board members will:

- “Recognize that I should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings;
- Render all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups;
- Work with other board members to establish effective board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent.”

School Board Operations Policy BBBC states, "The Board shall conduct an annual self-study in the Spring to evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness in the following areas:

1. Relationship with Superintendent
2. Community Relationship
3. Board Meetings
4. Staff and Personnel Relationships
5. Relationship to Instructional Program
6. Relationship to Financial Management of the Schools
7. Personal Qualities
8. Other"

The policy further explains that once the self-study has concluded, the Board will discuss the detailed results and formulate objectives for the ensuing year. "Objectives shall be stated in the form of behavioral or productivity modifications to be achieved." There was no evidence to support the Board's compliance with this policy in recent years.

#### **Rationale:**

Effective school boards are critical to the success of the school system as they set the vision, mission, and goals for the district; adopt policies that provide direction in support of meeting the districts goals, objectives, and strategic plan; adopt and oversee the district's annual budget; and hire and evaluate the superintendent. Boards of education and superintendents that operate in a cohesive manner inclusive of respect, trust, transparency and clear communication are able to lead as a unified team that focuses on specific goals to reach its vision, mission, and beliefs of the system.

#### **Directives:**

1. Participate in and document professional development focused on team building to develop trust and build positive relationships.
2. Conduct a literature review, case study and/or book review on highly effective governing boards and professional decorum.
3. Develop and document Code of Ethics and civility expectations and/or guidelines specific to the MPS Board of Education.
4. Identify and demonstrate characteristics of a highly effective governing board and professional decorum.
5. Conduct, discuss and document a board self-study prior to the start of the 2018-2019 school year.
6. Formulate and document behavioral and/or productivity objectives, strategies/actions, and evaluation measures based on the results of the board self-study.
7. Participate in professional development focused on Board Governance prior to the next Accreditation Engagement Review.



**Performance Level Rating: Leadership Capacity**

Leadership Capacity Standard		Score
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.	Needs Improvement

**Improvement Priority 3:**

**Implement a communications plan that ensures timely and consistent dissemination of information and awareness of the system's decisions and actions by internal and external stakeholders.**

**Evidence:**

Montgomery Public Schools Board Policy KB (Public Relations – News Media Relations) states “The Board shall make every attempt to represent the people according to the best interest of their children and in keeping with the laws of the State and Federal government. Therefore, the Board shall attempt to:

- A. Keep its members and the public informed regarding the policies, administrative operation, objectives, and successes or failures of the School District;
- B. Provide the means for furnishing full and accurate information, favorable and unfavorable, together with interpretations and explanations of the School District plans and operations;
- C. Provide means to receive public input regarding public education.”

Special Review Team members heard support of the system's purpose from all stakeholders interviewed, along with many comments in support of doing what is best for students. However, during school board meetings, community members expressed concerns about the welfare of the students. The pervasive attitude of “us and them” has resulted in a lack of communication causing an even stronger divisive atmosphere. A district leader said the divisive attitude is “from the school board on down.” Interviews revealed the lack of collaboration between the state's intervention team and the school system. Team members learned meetings were not consistently scheduled between the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the system's interim superintendent.

Interviews and data revealed the community's lack of trust in Montgomery Public Schools. According to student enrollment data from the Alabama State Department of Education, roughly 2300 students have left MPS since 2014. The CAO stressed the need to communicate the system's successes with the community. However, the lack of clarification about the magnet school lottery system and closing of several schools has resulted in even more unanswered questions from both internal and external stakeholders. According to principals, additional parents are leaning towards options other than MPS for their children's education.



Communication of administrative decisions is not systemic or systematic. During interviews, district and school leaders shared that they sometimes hear of decisions from the community instead of from their leaders. A district leader said, "I don't really know the course. I'm a rule follower, but I don't have the map." Others interviewed discussed the problems caused by the uncertainty resulting from the lack of communications. Employees are seeking employment elsewhere because they do not know what is happening in MPS, especially the possibility of reduction in force.

Interviews revealed that the state intervention team is striving to improve communication internally so principals can get correct information to staff. However, it was suggested that some principals are not sharing this information with staff. According to interviews, some principals have not grasped the sense of urgency facing MPS. While the review team heard about the desire to provide more communication among principals, interviews revealed that the meetings are often cancelled and when they do occur, no agenda is provided.

While the district's evidence included an organizational chart, board members and administrators expressed a lack of familiarity with the most recent chart and shared their concerns about the lack of clear lines of communication and supervision. Furthermore, Board Policy KB (Public Relations – News Media Relations), which addresses communication with all stakeholders, was issued on November 21, 1989. Board Policy LEBA (Interorganizational Relations - Parent/Family Involvement) was issued on February 23, 2003. Interviews with the Board and review of the evidence revealed that policies have not been revised and updated and therefore are not clearly written to ensure integrity and effective operations.

Key findings in the *District Review Report* compiled by Class Measures on May 16-18, 2017, also support the need for more systemic, systematic communication. Key findings included:

- The district and state department of education have both failed to communicate to staff the need to change instructional practices based on the new standards. Reviewers found "high levels of anxiety and frustration at the building level with many staff not knowing why or how they are supposed to change their practices" (p. 5).
- Communication between administrators and teachers concerning individualized feedback on their lesson plans and delivery is limited (p 6).
- While the district expects teachers to use web-based resources to teach the standards, there has been a lack of communication on what is available (p 7).
- Professional development that trains a representative from each school is not being communicated at the school level (p. 7).
- Communication is weak between special education teachers and their general education colleagues in spite of the district's mandate that special education teachers should be invited to professional learning communities (PLC's) or data meetings with their colleagues (p. 9).

**Rationale:**

Effective communication is necessary for the smooth operation of any school system. Ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of decisions will promote a sense of trust and collaboration. Without being kept informed, stakeholders will continue to be placed in adversarial positions that will limit MPS's continuous improvement efforts.

**Directives:**

1. Reevaluate the operational effectiveness of the organizational chart and communicate the outcome to stakeholders.
2. Ensure principals' are accountable for communicating information to their staffs.
3. Establish a routine of regular meetings designed to strengthen communications within departments, between departments, and between the central office staff and the schools.
4. Provide accurate and timely information to the community.
5. Develop and implement effective strategies and processes to collaborate with local municipalities to end divisiveness and build working relationships.
6. Review and update board policies concerning communication.

**Performance Level Rating:      Learning Capacity**

Learning Capacity Standards		Score
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	Needs Improvement
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem solving.	Needs Improvement

**Improvement Priority 4:**

**Foster a culture of student-centered learning that promotes research-based practices including personalized learning, differentiation, integration of technology, collaboration, inquiry-based learning and higher order thinking.**

**Evidence:**

Review team members had the opportunity to conduct observations using eleot in 20 classrooms in MPS. Even though this was a small number in relation to the entirety of classrooms in the system, the results provide a snapshot of student engagement. On a scale that ranges from 1.0 - 4.0, eleot ratings revealed an overall average of 1.75 in the area of differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that met learner needs. Only limited evidence was observed in the area of rigorous coursework, discussions and/or tasks that required the use of higher order thinking. The review resulted in an overall average of 1.95 on

this item. The overall rating in the Digital Learning Environment yielded a score of 1.12 revealing only minimal evidence of student use of digital tools to support the learning process. Members of the team saw Smartboards in a number of the classrooms observed. However, the use of Smartboards during instructional time was mainly by the teacher. Some students were observed using Chrome books to complete a collaborative research project with a partner through Google Docs. However, overall, the Special Review Team rarely observed students using digital tools to promote creative or critical thinking or to demonstrate application of their learning.

Interviews revealed the limited opportunities for schools to collect, analyze, and use data as part of progress monitoring or for identifying specific needs of students to support personalized instruction. Team members learned that a beginning of the year assessment was given with plans to give an end of the year assessment using the Scantron Achievement Series. However, the middle of the year assessment was not administered because of the loss of days resulting from inclement weather and a "worm virus" in the computer system. Interviews revealed some schools had developed internal means of measuring student progress using teacher made assessments. Yet, there was no clear discussion about utilizing any of the formative results to adjust classroom instructional delivery to address identified student needs through differentiation, flexible grouping or other proven instructional support strategies.

The District Review Report compiled by Class Measures revealed, "most [students] were not developing higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking and problem solving needed to complete more complex assignments." The report went on to state, "they [teachers] did not fully understand the need to change the way that they planned and delivered lessons, so that they could successfully facilitate learning situations where students can develop a deeper understanding of the concepts through frequent opportunities to collaborate, discuss problems together, and learn from each other (p.6)."

Strategy #2, Goal 2 of the MPS Strategic Plan 2022 calls for the "Creation of a professional learning strategy aligned to Phase I priorities designed to lay the foundation for strong instructional systems and structures in the school." According to the strategic plan, teacher professional learning topics included Mindset Core I and Content and Pedagogy Core. The timeline for completion of this professional learning was identified in the plan as July 2017.

### **Rationale:**

Research indicates that the impact of teaching and learning is the primary expectation of every system and its institutions throughout our states and nation. The establishment of a solid learning culture built on high expectations coupled with systematic measures of capturing, analyzing, and using student performance data to measure student mastery is critical to the success of the teaching and learning process. To support a solid learning culture, quality schools and school systems have systematically implemented sound instructional practices to

include differentiation, rigor, project-based learning, inquiry, and student use of technology to enhance the teaching and learning process.

**Directives:**

1. Identify, implement, and evaluate professional learning on specific research-based instructional strategies that are proven to enhance student learning and engagement.
2. Routinely monitor implementation of student engagement through eleot observations.
3. Use eleot results to expand professional development opportunities.
4. Identify or design and implement a comprehensive assessment system that includes the routine administration of formative measures and the use of the results from these assessments to adjust classroom instructional delivery as needed.

**Performance Level Rating:      Learning Capacity**

Learning Capacity Standards		Score
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.	Needs Improvement
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learner's needs and the system's learning expectations.	Emerging

**Improvement Priority 5:**

**Engage teachers, content area specialists, and other instructional staff in collaborative conversations about curricular processes and instructional expectations.**

**Evidence:**

The Alabama State Department of Education has strategically outlined and articulated rigorous and research-based expectations for knowledge and skills students should master by grade level and content area through the *Curriculum Guide to the Alabama Course of Study*. However, stakeholder interviews, examinations of evidence, and classroom observations during the Special Review revealed very limited collaborative opportunities within MPS to review, sequence, align, or assess curricular expectations.

Prior to arriving on site, the Special Review Team was provided a copy of the MPS Strategic Plan 2022. The plan referenced several goals and strategies that clearly are connected to curriculum processes in the district. Strategy A, Goal 2, outlined plans for the review and alignment of curriculum and instructional supports to schools and included the provision for the "audit/review and revision of district curriculum resources (frameworks, guides, scope and sequences, curriculum materials, etc." by May/June 2017. The plan further identified a priority of Phase I of implementation would be the "implementation of instructional systems,



structures, and processes in schools associated with components of the teaching and learning cycle.” Interviews with stakeholders evidenced little awareness of the existence of the plan and specifically to its curricular strategies, some of which have already been completed and linked with the plan.

Further examination of the district’s website revealed an extensive collection of documents housed on the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Documents page. Carefully organized by content area and by grade level, the listing of documents included items such as frameworks, curriculum guides, District Required Agenda Board Components, vocabulary cards/word walls, Frayer models, Constitution Day activities, checklists for self-evaluation, parent roadmaps, and flip books. However, again, interviews with stakeholders throughout the review revealed limited knowledge of how the documents were compiled, who was involved in the compilation or the extent of the systemic use of many of the documents. Observations in the classrooms revealed minimal evidence of implementation of the documents as provided on the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Documents page. For example, visual displays within classrooms that would show implementation of the documents were minimally observed during observations of classrooms.

Upon arriving on site, the team was presented a copy of the most recent version of the MPS State Intervention Organizational Chart. No date was attached to the chart and very few stakeholders interviewed during the review had seen the chart or even knew of its existence. According to the visual depiction of positions, housed at the central office are the persons holding the positions of Chief Academic Officer who is directly responsible for Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment and Accountability, and several other program entities. There is no direct alignment, according to the organizational chart, between the Chief Academic Officer and the six Principal Leads who, according to the MPS Strategic Plan 2022, are responsible for coordinating district support to schools and coordinating tasks such as planning from standards and/or planning from tasks, teaching (delivery of instruction), assessing, analyzing data and student work, adapting teaching and re-assessing, and reflecting. The six Principal Leads report directly to the Chief Administrative Officer. Throughout interviews, review team members consistently heard there are no clear system-wide, systemic processes in place and people tend to operate in isolation. Responses to questions consistently included reference to the lack of communication between groups often working on the same focus. One stakeholder stated, “There is a lot of brokenness in the system.” In speaking from a curricular standpoint, one stakeholder indicated “We are so disjointed.” This stakeholder concluded the interview by stating, “This experience has shown me how crucial it is to have a vision to help connect the work and to tell where we are going. There’s no cohesiveness in this district.”

Information included in the District Review Report by Class Measures noted an effective district practice was the fact the “district staff has developed a wide range of curricular materials to support teachers in the planning and delivery of lessons and units of work aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards in ELA and math.” However, the report identified “district leaders should now transfer ownership of the high-quality curricular resource guidance material they have developed to school leaders and instructional staff by shifting its emphasis

from refining these materials and resources to ensuring that they are being implemented with fidelity in all schools. (p. 1, 2)". Even though an abundance of resources has been made available to support instruction, the document revealed that district leaders have not been effective in supporting school leaders, instructional staff, and teachers in developing the knowledge and skills to use these resources to be successful in providing learning experiences that support the development of college and career readiness skills.

Leaders throughout the district have received initial training on the use of eleot® 2.0 as a tool to monitor student engagement in the classrooms. However, interviews with stakeholders provided a wide continuum depicting the actual use of the observation tools in the school buildings. It was noted during the review that a more robust training on eleot 2.0 will be conducted during the summer of 2018. The training will include the identification of specific expectations for utilization of the instrument to capture data on learner-centric behaviors during instructional time and the use of these data to enhance professional practices.

### **Rationale:**

To promote awareness, clarity, and consistency, representatives from school-level stakeholder groups should work collaboratively with system-level leaders when conducting the ongoing development, review, revision, and alignment of curricular documents that are designed to guide the teaching and learning process. It is critical that stakeholders routinely be included during decision-making processes especially when these decisions impact teaching and learning in the classroom. Such engagement enhances buy-in, ownership, communication, and ultimately, implementation of the processes and procedures decided on during planning discussions. As a conduit to continuous improvement, leadership must recognize the knowledge, skills, and talents of stakeholders throughout the organization and empower representatives from various stakeholder groups to be involved in establishing the expectations to which all members of the groups are expected to adhere.

### **Directives:**

1. Include representative groups of teachers, content area specialists, and other instructional staff in reviewing the wealth of curriculum documents housed on the website and determine which items will be mandated for implementation and use.
2. Establish a means to clearly communicate instructional expectations and monitor adherence to these expectations.
3. Develop, implement, and evaluate protocols and expectations for conducting eleot observations and using results to improve instructional practices.

**Performance Level Rating:      Resource Capacity**

Resource Capacity Standards		Score
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.	Needs Improvement
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Needs Improvement

**Improvement Priority 6:**

**Develop, implement, and monitor an effective budget process to strategically manage resources to meet current budgetary requirements and allocate human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's priorities.**

**Evidence:**

The *Alabama Fiscal Accountability Act* was signed into law on March 9, 2006, by Governor Bob Riley as a new chapter in Title 16 of the *Code of Alabama 1975*, dealing with local school board fiscal management. This act outlines and clarifies the responsibilities of the local superintendent of education, boards of education, and the chief school financial officers selected to perform the duties of managing the fiscal matters of the local boards of education. This act also gives the State Superintendent and State Board of Education the authority to intervene when local boards of education are found to be in unsound fiscal condition. On February 9, 2017, the Alabama State Board of Education voted unanimously to intervene in the Montgomery Public Schools (MPS) with one of the key components of the intervention being Finance and Operations. A month later (March 2017), according to ALSDE Local Education Agency Personnel System (LEAPS) for MPS, the former State Superintendent of Education approved MPS funds to provide principals of the failing schools a ten percent raise. Later, funding was approved to give the remaining principals the same ten percent raise in July 2017. Some stakeholders questioned the decision to provide the raises because of the financial status of MPS and the academic challenges within the system. The estimated cost of the raises was approximately \$425,000.00. According to interviews and additional information provided by ALSDE, the former State Superintendent of Education used MPS funds and hired *Cintas* to clean some school facilities in the system, costing the system \$768,000.00. Some stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the use of these funds because they felt the facilities and/or maintenance staff should have been held accountable to clean the schools. Evidence revealed that over a million dollars of MPS funds were used for the principals' raises and the cleaning of some school facilities early on during the intervention.

Based on interviews and the review of documentation, MPS Board of Education and the Chief Administrative Officer were unable to collaboratively agree upon and pass a budget for Fiscal



Year 2018 even after having two budget hearings required by the *Alabama Fiscal Accountability Act*. During a special called board meeting on October 26, 2017, the School Board voted 4-3 regarding the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Officer. (October 26, 2017). *Montgomery County Board of Education Budget Hearing II and Special Called Meeting, Oct. 26, 2017* (Video retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bztVq-3tGwo&t=6968s>)

However, an Annual Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 was submitted to the Alabama State Department of Education on October 31, 2017, with only the signature of the Chief Administrative Officer. During the review of the Montgomery Public Schools Strategic Plan 2022, Section B of the plan outlined strategies and/or plans to improve financial management and operations; however, during interviews, several leaders within the district, including the board members, stated that they had not seen the plan or had no knowledge of its existence. Also, throughout the Budget Hearing on October 26, 2017, some board members expressed a lack of communication regarding components of the proposed budget.

During a press conference on Friday, February 8, 2018, the Interim State Superintendent of Education shared his plans related to the financial deficiencies regarding MPS with a goal of providing sufficient reserves to address low student achievement. One of the key areas of the Interim State Superintendent's blueprint was to implement a plan to ensure that MPS would obtain its required one month reserve or operating balance, which is discussed in Section 16-13A-9 of the *Alabama Fiscal Accountability Act*. At the time of the Special Review Team's review, the one-month required operating balance for MPS was \$19,117,997, and the system's ending balance was \$15,567,396, leaving them with a deficit of \$3,550,601 to meet the required minimum for their one-month operating balance. MPS has not met its required one month-reserve since 2012. The table below outlines a ten-year history of MPS's one-month reserve from 2007 to 2017.

Fiscal Year	Beginning Balance	Revenues	Expenditures	Revenues Less Expenditures	Ending Balance	One-Month Operations	Number of One-Month Operating Balance
2007	24,491,064	217,788,849	217,069,235	719,614	25,210,678	18,089,103	1.39
2008	25,210,678	244,087,605	238,943,737	5,143,868	30,354,546	19,911,978	1.52
2009	30,348,146	215,819,543	230,178,512	(14,358,968)	15,989,177	19,181,543	0.83
2010	15,989,177	202,300,706	213,627,931	(11,327,225)	4,661,953	17,802,328	0.26
2011	4,661,028	211,294,884	201,189,530	10,105,354	14,766,381	16,765,794	0.88
<b>2012</b>	<b>14,766,381</b>	<b>214,775,744</b>	<b>208,333,007</b>	<b>6,442,737</b>	<b>21,209,118</b>	<b>17,361,084</b>	<b>1.22</b>
2013	21,204,468	212,217,481	215,985,079	(3,767,597)	17,436,871	17,998,757	0.97
2014	17,436,871	219,215,501	220,498,365	(1,282,864)	16,154,006	18,374,864	0.88
2015	16,154,006	226,129,110	224,976,432	1,152,679	17,306,685	18,748,036	0.92
2016	17,509,972	222,868,884	224,674,809	(1,805,926)	15,704,046	18,722,901	0.84
2017	15,704,046	229,288,706	229,422,376	(133,670)	15,570,377	19,118,531	0.81

Source, Alabama State Department of Education, 2018



During the February 8, 2018 press conference, the Interim State Superintendent partially addressed student achievement matters. He also outlined his plan to achieve the one-month operating balance and to partially address student achievement matters with a financial target of \$22.6 million in savings. The plan included eliminating 17 Central Office positions, closing three schools, closing some Central Office buildings and selling Georgia Washington Middle School to Pike Road City School System for \$9.75 million; however, the plan to sell Georgia Washington Middle School was met with opposition. Currently, based on the review of interview documentation and media coverage video, “AL Supreme Court denies 2 petitions in Georgia Washington case, appeal pending,” the sale of Georgia Washington Middle School had yet to be resolved at the time of the Special Review (March 21, 2018). *AL Supreme Court denies petitions in Georgia Washington case, appeal pending.* (Video retrieved from <http://www.wsfa.com/story/37778622/al-supreme-court-denies-2-petitions-in-georgia-washington-case-appeal-pending>) During the press conference, it was shared that “the sale of Georgia Washington Middle School will eliminate the need to release valuable teacher units, which are absolutely essential if our student achievement scores are to be improved.” However, during the Special Review, limited information was available to the review team regarding the next steps if the sale of the school does not take place in a timely manner. The Interim State Superintendent indicated he may be forced to eliminate additional personnel to increase the one-month operating balance for MPS to \$22.6 million.

Another essential component of the *Alabama Fiscal Accountability Act* (Section 16-13A-6) is for school systems to provide monthly reports, such as a financial statement showing the status of the local board of education accounts, to the Alabama State Department of Education. Based on the information submitted to the Alabama State Department of Education, the December 2017 financial statement was the last monthly report uploaded to the Alabama State Department of Education website by MPS, and that information was the first report of the fiscal year starting October 1, 2017. Interviews revealed there was limited information provided during regularly scheduled board meetings to the Board and stakeholders regarding MPS monthly financial statements since the October 26, 2017, Budget Hearing. During a review of the Alabama Department of Education Assignments of Foundation Units Form (Act 2011-264), a copy of an incomplete form was submitted and signed by the Chief Administrative Officer and the Interim Chief School Financial Officer with the FY2018 Budget indicating the required contents of the form were “Not Applicable” or “N/A” for MPS. However, according to a stakeholder, MPS will have schools listed on the required document because of the need to demonstrate that all units used by the district to staff their schools are accurately recorded as required by law.

In addition, the Montgomery Public Schools Audit (<https://www.scribd.com/document/361532830/Montgomery-Public-Schools-Audit>) conducted by the Alabama Office of Examiners of Public Accounts from October 1, 2015 - September 30, 2016, cited a “wide-range” of deficiencies in financial reporting. Citations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Use of a purchasing card without the required proper documentation, totaling over \$60,000.00;

- Restricted funds were used to pay payroll and other general expenditures;
- The system did not perform an annual inventory in 2014, 2015, or 2016;
- Major issues with internal accounting controls, which in turn, had an impact on financial statements being accurate;
- Ticket Sales Report Forms not being completed for paid admission for events at a local school;
- Classroom Instructional support funds were not made available to teachers by the date required by the *Code of Alabama 1975*, Section 16-1-8.1.

Based on the Alabama State Department of Education FY2018 Local Education Agency (LEA) Unit Breakdown Form, the following state-earned units for Montgomery Public Schools were allocated to the system based on the Average Daily Membership (ADM) of 30,275.55 students:

Teacher Units	Principal Units	Assistant Principal Units	Counselor Units	Library/ Media Units	Additional Unit	Career Tech Director	Career Tech Counselor	Total Units
1,758.05	52	31	57	55	1	5	2	1,961.05

Source, Alabama State Department of Education, 2018

Although the system received the above earned units from the state, over 162.27 local units, totaling a little over \$9.2 million in salaries, were funded by the local system for FY2018. Most of the costs in salaries were tied to administrative positions within the system. The table below provides a breakdown of MPS Locally-Funded Units for administrative positions with salaries:

Position	No. of Local Units	Salary
Superintendent	1	\$ 31,000
Assistant Superintendents	2	236,412
Chief School Financial Officer	1	99,601
Coordinator/Directors	18.27	1,620,479
Supervisor of Instruction	11	898,781
Supervisor (Other)	5	359,892
Supervisor of Attendance	1	52,232
Director/Assistant Director	1	82,458
Supervisor/Assistant Supervisor	6	400,316
Assistant Principal (4-8)	.5	33,614
Assistant Principal (N-6)	1	65,431
Assistant Principal (7-12)	1	70,290
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>48.77</b>	<b>\$3,950,506</b>

Source, Alabama State Department of Education, 2018

The table below shows a history of Montgomery Public Schools' Average Daily Membership over the past five years. As shown in the table below, MPS has continually lost students over the past five years.

#### Montgomery County Public Schools

##### ADM History By Grade

2018 - 2019 State Avg

5453.7438 5656.4681 5707.34966 5929.2028

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
K	2,895.85	2,772.55	2,437.05	2,415.65	2,342.60
1	3,248.85	3,327.80	3,075.60	2,868.95	2,816.15
2	2,682.35	2,756.80	2,791.30	2,597.00	2,390.75
3	2,448.40	2,593.65	2,613.20	2,777.90	2,538.50
4	2,449.95	2,409.15	2,446.80	2,512.85	2,689.10
5	2,469.95	2,368.25	2,227.30	2,357.85	2,433.15
6	2,439.25	2,174.30	2,092.60	2,031.55	2,124.95
7	2,471.50	2,374.35	2,097.00	2,074.25	1,978.60
8	2,366.35	2,340.00	2,277.80	2,040.90	1,996.65
9	2,803.70	2,707.20	2,782.30	2,614.85	2,231.00
10	2,149.60	2,385.20	2,092.35	2,222.85	2,101.50
11	1,739.20	1,751.35	1,889.30	1,863.50	1,938.40
12	1,682.35	1,743.45	1,816.00	1,897.45	1,895.50
	31,847.30	31,704.05	30,638.60	30,275.55	29,476.85

(143.25) (1,065.45) (363.05) (798.70) Change year over year

(1,208.70) (1,571.75) (2,370.45) Cumulative

(\$781,249) (\$6,026,68) (\$2,070,053) (\$4,735,654) Cost year over year

(\$781,249) (\$6,836.97) (\$8,970,527) (\$14,054,879) (\$30,643,628) Cumulative loss since 2014

Source, Alabama State Department of Education, 2018

#### Rationale:

Because of the many financial challenges that schools are currently facing across the nation, it is imperative that school systems have a viable process when managing their budget for each fiscal year. To support effective budget planning, many school systems now are using strategic plans to guide their efforts regarding effective implementation of sound budgetary practices. This provides greater accountability to their constituents as well as abiding by the laws that govern fiscal management. At the same time, it is important for boards of education and school leaders to work in a collaborative, respectful, and cohesive manner as they develop, implement, monitor, and strategically manage the system's resources. Effective financial management allows the system to meet current budgetary requirements in alignment with the system's priorities.



**Directives:**

1. Develop and implement a plan to achieve and sustain the required one month's operating balance and provide monthly updates to the Board and stakeholders during regularly scheduled board meetings and/or other venues.
2. Ensure that monthly financial statements and other required information and/or documents are submitted to the Alabama State Department of Education as required by law.
3. Conduct an analysis of the current budget regarding the use of federal, state, and local funds to ensure that each funding source is being used to strategically support student learning and organizational effectiveness. This should be a collaborative process among the Board, administrators, and other selected staff members.
4. Reevaluate the use of FY2018 Local Funded Units to determine where the number of units can be reduced to aid the system in obtaining its one-month operating budget.
5. Ensure that ALL of the proper procedures are followed during the development of FY2019 Budget using a collaborative process among the board, district and school leaders, and other essential staff members.
6. Ensure that FY2019 Final Budget is aligned to the system's goals in regards to strategically managing resources and allocating human, material, and fiscal resources to the system's priorities and its continuous improvement efforts.

**Accreditation Status**

Based on the findings of the Special Review, AdvancED concludes that Montgomery Public Schools is in violation of the following AdvancED Accreditation Standards and/or Policies:

***AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems***

Standard 1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.
Standard 1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.
Standard 1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.
Standard 2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.
Standard 2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem solving.
Standard 3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.

### ***AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems***

Standard 3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.
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In accordance with AdvancED Policies, Montgomery Public Schools will continue their accreditation with the status of **Accredited Under Review** pending a Monitoring Review to be held prior to **December 2018** to evaluate the progress on the Improvement Priorities contained herein.

### **Improvement Priorities**

The institution must address the following Improvement Priorities provided by the Special Review Team:

1. Review, revise, and comply with all board policies and state laws.
2. Develop, document, implement, and adhere to a code of ethics policy which defines the specific roles and responsibilities for members of a school board.
3. Implement a communications plan that ensures timely and consistent dissemination of information and awareness of the system's decisions and actions by internal and external stakeholders.
4. Foster a culture of student-centered learning that promotes research-based practices including personalized learning, differentiation, integration of technology, collaboration, inquiry-based learning and higher order thinking.
5. Engage teachers, content area specialists, and other instructional staff in collaborative conversations about curricular processes and instructional expectations.
6. Develop, implement, and monitor an effective budget process to strategically manage resources to meet current budgetary requirements and allocate human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's priorities.

### **Conclusion**

The AdvancED Special Review Team appreciates the ALSDE Intervention Team and the MPS leadership for their cooperation and collaboration in planning for the Special Review.

Following a thorough review of interviews, documentation, board meeting recordings, policies, media reports, and school and classroom observations, consistent themes revealed that MPS:

- Stakeholders want students to receive a quality education;
- Stakeholders support an intervention process that has a clear plan and path to help the system improve;
- Stakeholders are not informed in a timely manner regarding the intervention plan and process;
- Principal Leads provide needed support to school principals;
- Board of Education does not comply with all MPS policies;

- Board of Education members have not demonstrated due diligence in their roles and responsibilities as a unified board or as individual board members;
- Board of Education members lacks unity, respect and trust among each other.

If the Montgomery County Public School System is to realize their goals as stated in the MPS Strategic Plan 2022, transforming into a High Reliable Organization (HRO) and a High Performance Organization (HPO), all stakeholders from the community and state must recommit to the most important priority—the children of MPS. Board members must make the decision to abide by all of the governing laws and policies in a manner reflective of truth, honesty, integrity, and service. Board members, district and school leaders, teachers and every system employee must set a positive example for the students in MPS. Parents and students must do their part as active participants in the community and schools as they collaborate with the school system to focus on strategies and solutions to provide high quality education for all children. City and county municipalities, along with the MPS Board of Education, must commit to working collaboratively with each other.

There is no quick remedy for the woes of education. Effective school boards, district leaders, principals, and teachers can and do make a positive difference in their communities and can support the impact of improvements in student learning and achievement. Parents and communities also must be part of the solution. Commitment to continuous improvement activities that focus on high expectations, accountability, collaboration, engaged learners, mutual respect, trust, use of data, policy development, fiscal responsibility, and equitable management of resources will yield high performing and effective schools that positively impact student learning and achievement.

### **Next Steps: Using and Acting on The Special Review Report**

The results of the Special Review provide the next steps to guide the improvement journey of the Montgomery County Public School System in their efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. A copy of this report will be sent to the current Alabama State Superintendent and the current MPS Superintendent. MPS should use the report to guide its response to the findings and its improvement efforts.

MPS is accountable for addressing the Improvement Priorities identified in this report. Upon receiving the Special Review Report, Montgomery Public Schools must implement the following steps:

- Review and share the findings with stakeholders;
- Develop plans and take action to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the Special Review Team;
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts;
- Schedule and host a Monitoring Review by **December 2018**. The purpose of the Monitoring Review will be to assess the progress made in complying with the Special Review Team's Improvement Priorities;

- Submit an Institutional Progress Report, no less than two weeks prior to the scheduled Monitoring Review, detailing the steps taken, with supporting evidence, to address the Improvement Priorities. A report template will be provided to the institution.



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## About AdvancED

AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving the largest community of education professionals in the world. Founded on more than 100 years of work in continuous improvement, AdvancED combines the knowledge and expertise of a research institute, the skills of a management consulting firm and the passion of a grassroots movement for educational change to empower Pre-K-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential.

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