

Audit shows Office of Dropout Prevention was defunct, changed how graduation rate was calculated to improve stats

Press Release

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) failed to maintain an Office of Dropout Prevention (ODP) for the last 10 years as required by state law. Additionally, lawmakers told MDE to increase the graduation rate from 61% in 2006 to 85% by 2019, and MDE met this goal in part by changing how it calculates the graduation rate. State Auditor Shad White announced these findings and more in a performance audit released on Thursday, June 18.

“MDE has a responsibility to follow the law, just like I do in my position and Mississippians do in their everyday lives,” said Auditor White. “The law says that there should have been an Office of Dropout Prevention performing certain functions to help districts increase the graduation rate. That office was not functioning and not performing its duties under the law.”

In 2006, the Mississippi Legislature voted to create an Office of Dropout Prevention at MDE. The Office of

Dropout Prevention created the Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan to meet its obligations under state law. Auditors determined MDE has not employed an ODP director as required by law since 2009. Further, the MDE employees listed as being responsible for statewide dropout prevention were not aware a Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan existed.

The Plan also established benchmarks as a guide for reaching the legislative goal of an 85% statewide high school graduation rate. However, after those benchmarks were established, MDE changed the way graduation rates are calculated by no longer counting “repeaters,” or students who needed to repeat 12th grade. The change was also made without requesting an updated graduation rate goal from the Legislature. This change increased the MDE-published graduation rates by nearly 10% and misaligned MDE benchmarks with legislative intent.

“Mississippi’s teachers, parents, and administrators

have worked together to improve our graduation rate over the past few years, and that’s a commendable, important achievement,” said Auditor White. “But some of that improvement in the graduation rate, is just due to a change in the way MDE calculated the graduation rate. You have to be honest about it.”

Auditors also found MDE has not conducted an annual evaluation of local dropout prevention plans as required by law since 2014. Additionally, 73% of district-level dropout prevention plans failed to meet requirements set by MDE, and approximately half of these programs statewide are not monitored by MDE. Auditors also found only 29% of these programs are based on evidence despite MDE’s stated commitment to sponsoring evidence-based programs.

The report recommends MDE reestablish the Office of Dropout Prevention and update benchmarks set in the Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan to account for

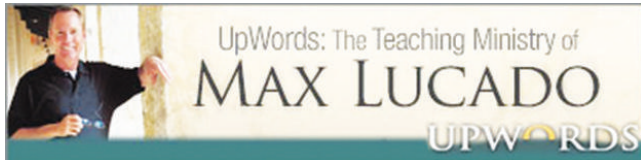
changes in how graduation rates are calculated.

The report also suggests the Legislature consider taking action to ensure the Office of Dropout Prevention is operational and submits regular legislative updates “As a product of our pub-

lic schools and the son and grandson of Mississippi public school teachers, I’m proud to see our state has made progress toward a higher graduation rate. We still have more work to do, of course, and with a reestablished ODP and clarity

on how graduation rates are calculated, MDE can make additional steps toward that goal,” said White.

The performance audit report can be found online by searching under the “Reports” tab at www.osa.ms.gov.



Changed from the Inside Out

When you believe in Christ, Christ works a miracle in you. You are permanently purified and empowered by God himself. The message of Jesus to the religious person is simple: It’s not what you do. It’s what I do. I have moved in. And in time you can say with Paul, “I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

If I’m born again, why do I fall so often?

Why did you fall so often after your first birth? Did you exit the womb wearing cross-trainers? Did you do the two-step on the day of your delivery? Of course not. And when you started to walk, you fell more than you stood. Should we expect anything different from our spiritual walk?

But I fall so often, I question my salvation. Again, we return to your first birth. Didn’t you stumble as you were learning to walk? And when you stumbled, did you question the validity of your physical birth? Did you, as a one-year-old fresh flopped on the floor, shake your head and think, I have fallen again. I must not be human?

Of course not. The stumbles of a toddler do not invalidate the act of birth. And the stumbles of a Christian do

not annul his spiritual birth.

Do you understand what God has done? He has deposited a Christ seed in you. As it grows, you will change. It’s not that sin has no more presence in your life, but rather that sin has no more power over your life. Temptation will pester you, but temptation will not master you. What hope this brings!

Hear this. It’s not up to you! Within you abides a budding power. Trust him!

Think of it this way. Suppose you, for most of your life, have had a heart condition. Your frail pumper restricts your activities. Each morning at work when the healthy employees take the stairs, you wait for the elevator.

But then comes the transplant. A healthy heart is placed within you. After recovery, you return to work and encounter the flight of stairs—the same flight of stairs you earlier avoided. By habit, you start for the elevator. But then you remember. You aren’t the same person. You have a new heart. Within you dwells a new power.

Do you live like the old person or the new? Do you count yourself as having a new heart or old? You have a choice to make.

You might say, “I can’t climb stairs; I’m too weak.”

Does your choice negate the presence of a new heart? Dismiss the work of the surgeon? No. Choosing the elevator would suggest only one fact—you haven’t learned to trust your new power.

It takes time. But at some point you’ve got to try those stairs. You’ve got to test the new ticker. You’ve got to experiment with the new you. For if you don’t, you will run out of steam.

Religious rule keeping can sap your strength. It’s endless. There is always another class to attend, Sabbath to obey, Ramadan to observe. No prison is as endless as the prison of perfection. Her inmates find work but never find peace. How could they? They never know when they are finished.

Christ, however, gifts you with a finished work. He fulfilled the law for you. Bid farewell to the burden of religion. Gone is the fear that having done everything, you might not have done enough. You climb the stairs, not by your strength, but his. God pledges to help those who stop trying to help themselves.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6.) God will change you from the inside out.

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