

State Superintendent's Annual Report for 2020-21 notes achievements as students, teachers persevered through pandemic

JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) 2020-21 Superintendent's Annual Report has been released, detailing how Mississippi students, teachers and school leaders continued to strive in classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic by building upon historic academic gains of recent years. View the report online at mdek12.org/superintendent2021.



- Report highlights:
- Graduation rate reached an all-time high of 87%; graduation rate of students with disabilities reached an all-time high of 55.4%, more than double the rate of 23.2% in 2014.
 - Dropout rate fell to an historic low of 8.8%.
 - Statewide assessments resumed with 97% of students participating.
 - The Advanced Placement exam passing rate for 2021 reached an all-time high of 37.4% for a full school year.
 - The number of students who completed career and technical education courses of study increased 36% from 2015 to 2021.
 - Nearly 400,000 computer devices secured for students through Mississippi Connects initiative and other funds.
 - In partnership with Mis-

issippi Public Broadcasting, MDE literacy coaches and other certified teachers filmed 260 lessons to preK-12th grade students on the MPB Classroom TV channel.

- Class of 2022 graduates can now earn an academic endorsement to automatically qualify for admission into any of Mississippi's public universities. Graduates can also earn a career and technical education endorsement.

- Approximately 3,000 students enrolled in 18 Early Learning Collaboratives across the state with plans to enroll 6,000 students in additional ELCs in 2022-23 now that funding has doubled from \$8 million to \$16 million.

- A team of 112 coaches support teachers and school leaders in the areas of literacy, early childhood education, special education,

school improvement and digital learning. Math coaches will be added in 2022.

- Three schools exited the Comprehensive Support and Improvement program and four schools were named 2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools.

Assessment results indicate the pandemic's toll on learning. Pre-pandemic, student proficiency had reached an all-time high of 41.6% in English Language Arts (ELA) and 47.4% in mathematics in 2019. When assessments resumed in 2021, student proficiency decreased in ELA to 34.9% and mathematics to 35.1%. Like other states, achievement dropped more in mathematics than ELA.

"Despite some setbacks, Mississippi students, families, teachers and school leaders persevered through the most challenging school year of their lives, and I could not be more proud,"

Alleged Catalytic Converter Thief Indicted in George County

Elijah Murrah is charged with stealing school district property

JACKSON, Miss. – State Auditor Shad White and George County School District Superintendent Wade Whitney, Jr. announced today Elijah Murrah has been indicted for grand larceny in George County. Special Agents from the State Auditor's office assisted the George County School Dis-



trict Police Department in the investigation. Murrah is accused of stealing multiple catalytic converters from parked vehicles owned by the George County School District. He allegedly used a saw to cut the catalytic converters from school-owned vehicles and later sold them.

"Theft of property from public school children cannot be tolerated. If you

know of any other theft of any property from school districts, please contact my office," said Auditor White. "We will keep your identity confidential."

"The George County School District will continue to have a zero tolerance for the theft of any school district property," said Superintendent Whitney. "We are very proud of the efforts of our school district police department and the support we received from the State Auditor's Office."

If convicted of this grand larceny charge, Murrah will face up to 5 years in prison and \$10,000 in fines. Murrah is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. The case will be prosecuted by the office of District Attorney Angel McIlrath.

Suspected fraud can be reported to the Auditor's office online any time by clicking the red button at www.osa.ms.gov or via telephone during normal business hours at 1-(800)-321-1275.

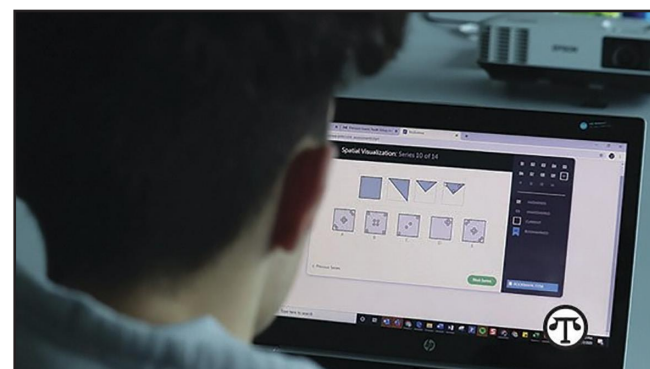
Why Every Student Should Take An Aptitude Test

(NAPSI)—A question many teens are often asked is, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" While becoming a YouTube star or a rock star may be the "official" answer, most people end up pursuing careers they are familiar with through family, friends or day-to-day exposure—in many cases because they don't know what other options they have.

It's been proven that when students' educations align with their aptitudes, or abilities, graduation rates increase. When using their natural talents at work, people tend to be more successful and more satisfied in their careers. One of the best ways for individuals to determine their natural abilities and what they will excel in, is by taking an aptitude assessment.

What Is an Aptitude Assessment?

Unlike a personality test that might tell a student that they are an extrovert and should be in sales, aptitude tests use a series of behavioral assessments designed to identify natural talents. In their simplest form, aptitude tests look at what you like and what you do well inherently, and use science to accurately hone in on true abilities. Things that are easy for some people can prove challenging to others. For example, some people are naturally excellent at handling numbers, others have impressive spatial awareness. Tests, such as You-Science Discovery, assess these areas and many more in a series of time-based exercises. In the case of You-Science Discovery, at the end of the aptitude assessment, each person is shown



Learning what you're good at can help set you on the road to a great career.

all of the potential career opportunities that are ideal for their specific talents, including careers potentially never previously considered.

Why Aptitude Tests Have a Lasting Effect

New Opportunities: When academic and career guidance decisions are based solely on students' reported interests, important pieces of the puzzle are missed. According to the research from The University of Missouri, interests are influenced by perceived "societal norms" that limit the scope of students' career exploration. Aptitude tests uncover what students do well naturally and how they solve problems. Performance measures of aptitudes go beyond what students see around them and help expand their vision of college and career opportunity and possibility.

Level Playing Field: Aptitude tests cut through social noise and biases. By empowering students with the knowledge of their unique capabilities, these exams help close the exposure gap and prepare students for career fields they may not have otherwise thought of or even known about. Each person has natural abilities; when

these talents are identified, students often feel that they have more of a focus and a purpose.

Preventing Wasted College Credits: A college education is highly valuable, but too often students enter with one major and graduate with another. In fact, up to 80% of college students change their majors at least once before graduating. Not only can this cause a headache, it can be a costly mistake. Taking an aptitude test before attending college can help get students on a college or career track that lasts. Getting affirmation that an area of study makes sense for a successful career can prevent wasted credits and years studying the "wrong" material.

Backed by research, aptitude tests provide insights into the "science of each person," helping individuals uncover and discover new purpose and intent. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" can now be answered with a sense of confidence and, importantly, can provide students with the positive reinforcement needed to pursue careers in high-demand industries where they can succeed beyond their imagination.

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