School Accountability, Race, Poverty and Teacher Quality in Mississippi: Opportunity for More Socially Equitable Accountability Model

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School Accountability

- School Accountability ratings are a vital part of any consideration or conversation on public school quality and thus help shape public perception of schools.

- School accountability serves as data for policy makers and politicians to justify certain policies regarding the funding, staffing, and utility of public schools.

School Accountability

- A cursory examination of the accountability model in Mississippi reveals what appears to be an *equal* expectation of every public school and district in Mississippi. Every school is held accountable to the *same* academic and accreditation standards and model.

- An examination of the results of the model over the last two years reveals some peculiar trends. Almost every A-rated district averages a student enrollment that is predominantly white, while every F-rated district is comprised of students that are overwhelmingly black and in communities that are overwhelmingly poor.

Table I
Mississippi District Accountability Ratings and Demographic Data-2018-2019 School Year:
10 Highest Rated Districts

District	2019 Accountability Grade	Total Student Pop	% Black	% White	%Other*
Petal School District	A	4169	17.4	72.3	8.5
Ocean Springs School District	A	6041	13.0	75.7	10.8
Clinton Public School District	A	5306	54.4	35.8	9.5
Madison County School District	A	13310	39.1	49.6	11.2
Oxford School District	A	4492	33.6	51.7	14.7
Enterprise School District	A	937	8.9	89.1	N/A
Biloxi Public School District	A	6309	33.6	41.0	25.3
Union County School District	A	2931	8.1	87.1	4.7
Lamar County School District	A	10718	27.8	62.2	8.9
Rankin County School District	A	19160	23.9	68.1	7.8

Table II
Mississippi District Accountability Ratings and Demographic Data-2018-2019 School Year:
10 Lowest Rated Districts

District	2019 Accountability Grade	Total Student Pop	% Black	% White	%Other
Yazoo City Municipal School District	F	2422	97.8	0.7	0.9
West Bolivar Consolidated School District	F	1110	95.8	2.6	1
Wilkinson County School District	F	1083	98.3	1.0	NA*
Holmes County Consolidated School District	F	2965	99.0	1.0	NA
Amite County School District	F	929	82.6	15.5	1.5
North Bolivar Consolidated School District	F	920	97.6	NA	NA
Noxubee County School District	F	1458	96.2	0.8	2.3
East Tallahatchie Consolidated School District	F	1084	80.0	17.0	2.5
Leflore County School District	F	2286	93.7	1.1	5.0
West Tallahatchie School District	F	695	99.0	NA	NA

Research Project

- This project looks at the accountability ratings of districts in the state of Mississippi to analyze the degree to which demographic measures of poverty-operationalized with free lunch rates- and teacher quality measures characterize the rating a district will receive.

- Student free and reduced lunch data, racial demographics, and the percentage of teachers teaching with experience, proper credentials and in the academic subject area they are credentialed for are compared.

- Teacher credential variables are examined because one of the dominant narratives among educational policy leaders in the state concerning the academic achievement gap notes the need for more experienced and better trained teachers in districts that are chronically underperforming according to the accountability ratings (Skinner 2018)

Research Methods

- The dependent variable "School Accountability Rating" for each public school district in Mississippi was compared through correlation and linear regression analysis with the following independent variables:

  - % Free Lunch- Percentage of Students who qualify for Federal Free Lunch program

  - % Black -Percentage of Black Students

  - % Experienced - Percentage of teachers with at least 3 years experience

  - % Provisional - Percentage of teachers on a Provisional License

  - % In-Field - Percentage of teachers teaching in-field, courses they are licensed to teach

Findings (Dependent Variable-Accountability Rating)

Independent variables	Pearson Correlation	R-Squared / Std. Error of Est.
% Free Lunch	-.787**	.619 /.850
% Black	-.790**	.623 / .810
% Experienced Teacher	.528**	.279 / 1.121
% Teacher "In-field"	.532**	.283 / 1.118
% Teacher on Provisional License	-.627**	.393 / 1.028

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Findings

- The demographic variables % Black and % Free Lunch have a significant, negative and high Pearson value, meaning that the relationship between them and the accountability rating is strong and inversely related.

- The teacher quality variables % Experienced and % In-Field have significant, positive and moderate Pearson values, meaning that the relationship is significant and positive.

- The teacher quality variable % Provisional had a significant, negative, and high Pearson value meaning that the relationship between them and the accountability rating is strong and inversely related. R-square is not as big as the demographic variables.

Findings/Discussion

- Stronger correlations between the demographic measures and the school ratings indicate that the greater factors in the school rating outcomes are demographic. This has implications for how the ratings are used in policy decision making.

- This also places districts with high levels of poor, minority students at a disadvantage when it comes to the accountability model.

Findings/Discussion- Equity

- Policy alternatives can involve adding components to the model that help mitigate the disadvantages that schools and districts that serve predominantly poor and minority student populations may have under the current accountability model.

- Adding an achievement gap component will allow for the districts to focus on how to attend to the specific needs of different groups of students.

Table III
Mississippi District Accountability Ratings and MAAP ELA Disaggregated Achievement Data - 2018-2019 School Year:
10 Highest Rated Districts

District	2019 Accountability Grade	% Prof. Black	% Prof. White	Achievement Gap
Petal School District	A	38.8	70.9	32.1
Ocean Springs School District	A	40.9	61.6	20.7
Clinton Public School District	A	48.7	78.5	29.9
Madison County School District	A	44.5	76.3	31.8
Oxford School District	A	30.4	77.2	46.8
Enterprise School District	A	29.4	64.3	34.9
Biloxi Public School District	A	34.4	65.5	31.0
Union County School District	A	39.5	61.6	22.1
Lamar County School District	A	37.2	61.2	24.0
Rankin County School District	A	39.5	60.5	21.5

Table IV
Mississippi District Accountability Ratings and MAAP ELA Disaggregated Achievement Data -
2018-2019 School Year:
10 Lowest Rated Districts

District	2019 Accountability Grade	% Prof. Black	% Prof. White (Number of Students)	Achievement Gap
Yazoo City Municipal School District	F	10.0	NA	NA^
West Bolivar Consolidated School District	F	17.5	35.3 (17)	17.8
Wilkinson County School District	F	18.3	NA	NA^
Holmes County Consolidated School District	F	16.9	38.5 (13)	21.5
Amite County School District	F	16.3	29.3 (75)	13.1
North Bolivar Consolidated School District	F	18.9	NA	-18.9^
Noxubee County School District	F	17.8	NA	-1.1^
East Tallahatchie Consolidated School District	F	15.7	37.0 (73)	21.3
Leflore County School District	F	16.6	33.3 (12)	16.7
West Tallahatchie School District	F	20.7	NA	NA^

Findings/Discussion-Equity

- The average racial demographic composition of the 10 highest performing school districts is Black 25.1% White: 63.3% Asian, Hispanic, Native American and Multiple-Race students combined ("Other"): 10.1%.

- The average racial demographic composition of the 10 highest performing school districts is Black 94.0% White: 4.0%, Other: 2.0% .

- 5 of the 10 lowest performing districts had less than 10 white students taking the MAAP ELA exam in 2018-2019 school year. This indicates the level of racial segregation in the lowest performing schools is extremely high.

Findings/Discussion-Equity

- A component of a "demographic qualifier", would shift the accountability scoring for a school or a district to weigh more academic growth in the total score of a school or district depending on the demographic makeup of the student population.

- While the State is doing well to work toward providing more experienced and better prepared teachers for more students, adding measures that would mitigate the effects of segregation and the concentration of poverty in schools will help to create a more equitable accountability model.

Works Cited / Sources

- Skinner, Kayleigh. "'Miseducation' in Mississippi: Racial disparities persist in discipline, access to advanced classes." *Mississippi Today*, November 5, 2018: NA.

- Data obtained from the Public Reporting website published by the Mississippi Department of Education https://www.mdek12.org/OPR/Reporting