



Office of Accountability
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June 6, 2025

Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School Board Members
Derrick T. Simmons, Esq.
Ms. Mary Johnson, Superintendent
P. O. Box 1497
1901 Highway 82 West
Greenwood, MS 38930

RE: Notice of Noncompliance

Dear Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School Board Members, Attorney Simmons, and Ms. Johnson:

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) received your response to MDE's correspondence dated April 17, 2025. While MDE appreciates your prompt response to our request, the MDE disagrees with your claim that the Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District (GLCSD) Board's hiring of Ms. Mary Johnson as superintendent of the Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District was the direct result of an emergency.

Additionally, MDE's review of the facts, including the documentation submitted by the GLCSD, Mississippi law, GLCSD Board Policies, and the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2024*, reveal that the GLCSD not only failed to comply with GLCSD Policy GBCA, but also, the GLCSD is in violation of the following:

- **Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-7** which states that it shall be unlawful for any superintendent, principal or teacher to be employed or contracted with to teach or serve in any of the public schools of this state who does not hold a proper license as required by the State Board of Education.
- **Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-13 (1)(a) and (c)** states that each school district shall have a superintendent of schools, selected in the manner provided by law. No person shall be eligible to the office of superintendent of schools unless such person shall hold a valid administrator's license issued by the State Department of Education and shall have classroom or administrative experience of not less than six (6) years which shall include at least three (3) years of administrative experience as a school building principal (a) in a school with an "A" or "B" accountability rating, or (b) in a school that increased its accountability rating by a letter grade during the period in which the principal was employed as principal

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at the school, or (c) in a school with comparable accountability rating or improvement in another state which shall be verified by the Mississippi Department of Education. Miss. Code Ann. § 37-19-13(1)(c) further provides the State Board of Education with authority to provide districts with alternative qualifications if the candidate does not meet the qualifications outlined in Miss. Code Ann. § 37-19-13(1)(a).

- **Miss. Code Ann. § 37-61-19** states that it is unlawful for any contract to be entered into or expenditure made in excess of the legally available and approved resources. Therefore, the MDE is concerned that Ms. Johnson may not be legally authorized to receive or expend district funds.
- **GLCSD Policy CEC – (Superintendent Recruitment)** includes the following:
 - When an opening in the position of superintendent occurs, the GLCSD Board of Trustees shall make every effort to fill the position with the most capable person available.
 - The board shall consider only those candidates who meet both state and local qualifications and who display the ability to successfully carry out the duties of superintendent.
 - Applications for the position of superintendent shall be screened and those candidates who met the legal requirements and board criteria shall be interviewed.
- Process Standards of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2024*:
 - **Process Standard 1** mandates the local school board and the superintendent of schools shall exercise due diligence in performing the respective duties of each office in accordance with applicable law.
 - **Process Standard 1.1** mandates school boards assign all executive and administrative duties to the superintendent, who is properly licensed and chosen in the manner prescribed by law. Miss. Code Ann. § 37-6-3(3-4); § 37-9-7, 13, 14; and §37-61-9
 - **Process Standard 1.2** – mandates school board policies comply with state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations and that they serve as the basis of operation for the district, and current copies (print or electronic) of school board policies are published and available for public review. Miss. Code Ann. § 25-41-7; §§ 25-61-1 through 17; §§ 37-9-1 through 75; §§ 37-9-101 through 113; § 37-7-301(p)(w); and Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Summary of Findings:

On April 3, 2025, during a special-called board meeting, the GLCSD Board appointed a new (permanent) superintendent without publishing notice of the vacant position per the GLCSD Policy GBCA which states that “Vacancies must be advertised for a minimum of fourteen business days except in cases of extreme emergency as determined by the

superintendent.” The MDE finds no evidence to support the GLCSD’s position that the GLCSD’s failure to follow Policy GBCA by hiring of a permanent superintendent was due to an emergency situation. Additionally, the MDE finds no evidence to support the GLCSD’s claim that Ms. Mary Johnson is properly qualified to serve as superintendent as required by Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-13 (1)(a) or by the alternative qualification set forth by the Mississippi State Board of Education as authorized by Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-13(3). If the GLCSD Board had reason to believe that Ms. Johnson met the alternative qualification, the Board failed to adopt a formal resolution supporting Ms. Johnson’s appointment and failed to request a nonrenewable, three-year license with a 496 endorsement. Therefore, the GLCSD Board failed to ensure that Ms. Johnson was eligible to serve as superintendent before appointing her as superintendent and executing a contract.

Furthermore, MDE has received complaints that Ms. Johnson may have falsified information on her resume by stating that she served as a Deputy Assistant Superintendent.

Conclusion:

Based on the above determinations, and in accordance with Accreditation Policy 2.4 of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2024*, the Office of Accreditation is placing a citation in the District’s Accreditation Record Summary (ARS) and notifying the superintendent of the verified violations. Additionally, because GLCSD funds are being used to pay a superintendent who is not properly licensed or certified, the MDE will be notifying the Office of the State Auditor of potential misuse of funds.

Sincerely,



Jo Ann Malone, Ed.D.
Associate State Superintendent
Office of Accreditation

Cc: Dr. Lance Evans, State Superintendent of Education
Erin Meyer, General Counsel
Dr. Paula A. Vanderford, Chief Accountability Officer
Dr. Cory Murphy, Associate State Superintendent
Mississippi School Boards Association