
TOSS
Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents
2027 TENNESSEE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR
DR. MARLON KING, SUPERINTENDENT
JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY SCHOOLS
JMCSS
JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

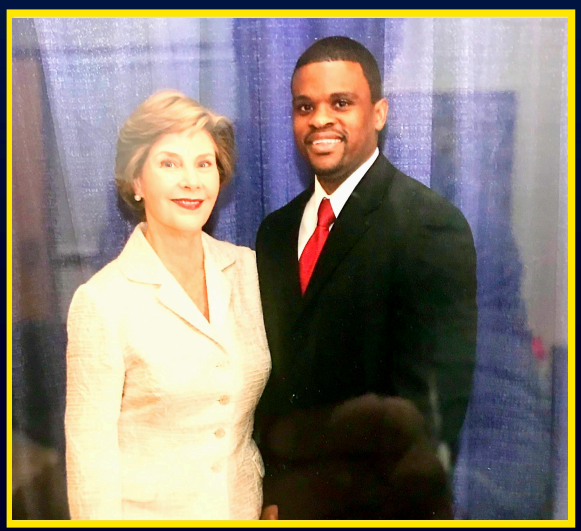
About the finalist

Marlon D. King, a proud native of Tennessee and a product of the state's public school system from kindergarten through 12th grade, is a highly respected and dedicated educator who has made remarkable strides in the field of education as a superintendent. His journey began as a substitute teacher and evolved through roles as an educational assistant, teacher, principal, superintendent, and contributor to state education agency work. Throughout his career, Marlon has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to student success and educational excellence.



Marlon's journey from igniting passion in classrooms as a teacher to skillfully navigating the boardrooms as a superintendent across Tennessee showcases his versatile leadership and unwavering commitment to education. Emphasizing innovative teaching methods, particularly in early-grade reading, he has tirelessly worked to accelerate learning opportunities, especially in high-poverty schools within the Shelby County School System. His unwavering dedication to his students has set him apart as a beacon of excellence in the education community.

Transitioning from the classroom to the principal's office, Marlon was entrusted with leading one of Tennessee's historically underperforming schools, ranked in the bottom 5% statewide. Although Marlon is a reform-minded leader, he realizes that there are no silver bullets to advancing student achievement. He executes initiatives without creating disruptive environments, focusing instead on fostering a collaborative atmosphere that advances student outcomes. His talent lies in creating environments where high-impact teachers choose to stay, acting as a powerful teacher-retention strategy. Through collaborative efforts with staff and by forging partnerships with parent groups, Marlon led the establishment of a comprehensive school-wide literacy program and fostered deep engagement with families. The remarkable transformation of the school led to its prestigious recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School, culminating in an invitation to co-present with former First Lady Laura Bush at a national reading conference.







Recognized as a transformational leader, Marlon replicated his success at another underperforming school within the district, elevating student achievement and fostering a culture of family involvement in student success. His exceptional leadership and innovative approaches caught the attention of the education community, paving the way for his appointment as the superintendent of Haywood County Schools—a significant milestone as the first young minority superintendent to break barriers in the state. This appointment marked a meaningful return to his hometown and the public school system he attended.

During his tenure as superintendent, Marlon worked closely with the board, community, staff, students, and families to drive record improvements in the district. The graduation rate soared, surpassing the state benchmark of 90%, while ACT scores and TCAP proficiency rates saw significant increases.

Confidence in the public school system was restored, leading to an influx of families returning to the district and an increase in funding due to student growth, a notable achievement in an era where public schools are seeing declining enrollment. Working closely with the County Legislative Body, Marlon secured $4 million in funding to renovate the open-space classroom high school, transforming it into conducive learning spaces for students.

Amidst a pivotal shift in leadership, Marlon joined the Tennessee Department of Education following the announcement of the $500 million Race to the Top award. He was recruited to transform the regional service center into a dynamic academic support center known as the CORE (Center of Regional Excellence) Office in the southwest region.



Previously Superintendent of Haywood and Fayette County Schools

As Executive Director, Marlon worked tirelessly alongside 18 superintendents, providing essential academic, leadership, and operational supports.
After a fulfilling three-year tenure in state agency work, Marlon was called upon by the Fayette County Public Schools community to return as superintendent. Facing challenges such as board division, fiscal concerns, academic obstacles, and a loss of community confidence, Marlon fearlessly accepted the task of leading Fayette County Public Schools. Leveraging partnerships with the Tennessee School Boards Association, Tennessee Education Association, and Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents, Marlon built a robust framework to address the district's operational, academic, and board challenges through professional development and onsite trainings.

SOY | About the finalist

Through his visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to student success, Marlon guided the board toward a cohesive focus on student achievement. By forging strong partnerships with the County Commission, he championed financial stability and strategic investments that resulted in a $6 million increase in the fund balance. This financial foundation allowed for vital enhancements in teacher compensation, school renovations, technology upgrades, and various initiatives aimed at enriching the learning environment for students in Fayette County Public Schools.

"Marlon hit the ground running."

As in his previous district, the graduation rate surpassed the state benchmark, while the number of schools demonstrating a Level 5 in student growth and achievement in literacy and numeracy increased. Marlon is an expert at uniting communities around public education, fostering a common goal of supporting student success. Restoring confidence in the community, families returned to the school system, increasing BEP funding due to new enrollment growth.

Known for unifying groups that had never worked together to become high-functioning teams, Marlon saw an opportunity to take on another challenge by applying for the superintendent vacancy for the Jackson-Madison County School System, working with the TSBA, which led the search process.





In the midst of a global pandemic, Marlon hit the ground running.

Dr. King implemented various programs to address student learning loss and support employees' mental health and social well-being, resulting in improved teacher and employee attendance and staff morale. He also collaborated with the board to create a 5-Year Investment in Every Employee Progression Plan (IEP²), which moved beginning teacher salaries from the bottom 25% of the state to the top 30%, attracting top talent. Teacher recruitment, absenteeism, and morale improved dramatically, leading the district to become a Level 5 in student growth, with numerous schools achieving the same level of growth and being designated as Reward Schools.

Student achievement accelerated in literacy and numeracy, and the graduation rate again surpassed the state benchmark. Additionally, Jackson-Madison County School System received $950,000 due to fast growth and increased enrollment.

As an exceptional leader, Marlon was featured in the "People Watch" section of School Administrator magazine, published by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in September 2020. While attending the University of Mississippi, Marlon was awarded the prestigious Outstanding Doctor of Education Award, signifying his exemplary contributions to the field of education.

District Background

In 1992, to provide historical context, a significant transformation took place in Jackson, Tennessee, when the Jackson City and Madison County Schools consolidated, forming the Jackson-Madison County School System (JMCSS). This merger aimed to unify educational efforts and resources for better outcomes, yet it also marked the beginning of an era filled with leadership instability. Over the years, the community experienced a string of superintendents who averaged between two to four years on the job.

This constant turnover contributed to a growing sense of distrust among the County Commission, particularly concerning questions surrounding school system spending ***(Source: Jackson Sun https://tinyurl.com/bdez6pm4).*** County legislators believed that the school system had historically failed to communicate its needs effectively, perpetuating a pattern of conflict ***(Source Jackson Sun, May 16, 2016 https://tinyurl.com/58wcvnya).*** When I interviewed for the superintendent position in February 2020, community members consistently expressed their desire for stability and consistency in leadership

(Source: Jackson Sun, April 8, 2020 https://tinyurl.com/58wcvnya).



I was the 12th superintendent since the merger, a testament to the instability that had plagued the district. Despite the challenges posed by a historically divided nine-member school board, intentional efforts were made to engage employees, families, elected officials, and our industry neighbors. These efforts have led to a shift in the local narrative, where our students are now the chief recipients of a unified front dedicated to progress and collaboration. Although the process has been challenging, the results have been rewarding for all stakeholders in Jackson-Madison County. When I took on the role, I was fully aware of the obstacles, from a fractured school board to issues in academics and school safety/student discipline. In partnership with the Tennessee School Boards Association (TSBA), we developed what we believed would be a game-changer for the system: a 5-Year Strategic Plan — The ABC Report ***(Source: JMCSS Communication https://tinyurl.com/37p88a59).*** The TSBA facilitated board retreats in addition to professional development opportunities around board governance, helping the board become more united. Together, we took courageous steps to develop a plan that would address our core focus, which we call 'Triple A' – Academics, Arts, and Athletics. Within this plan, we collectively generated core values using the JMCSS initials to represent each core value – Judgment, Motivation, Courage, Support, and Service. We also created belief statements to guide our behavior.

From my experience with divided boards in other districts, I learned quickly that establishing core values and belief statements would lead to positive behavioral changes as they provided guiding principles to follow. Geographically, Jackson, Tennessee, nicknamed the Hub City, is centrally located in West Tennessee, only 120 miles from Nashville and 80 miles from Memphis. This strategic location makes it the second most populous county in the western region of the state. Our community is characterized by a varied demographic mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities.



SOY | District Background



From a demographic perspective, despite the nationwide decline in student enrollment due to factors such as low birth rates, school choice programs, and charter/private schools, our district is considered fast-growing. We have nearly 2,000 certified and classified employees serving a student population of approximately 13.054. Even with the presence of seven private/parochial schools in our community creating an atmosphere of competition, we have seen the largest increase in enrollment in more than two decades, with approximately 200 additional students this year alone. This increase in enrollment has generated an additional $950,000 through the new TISA funding formula.



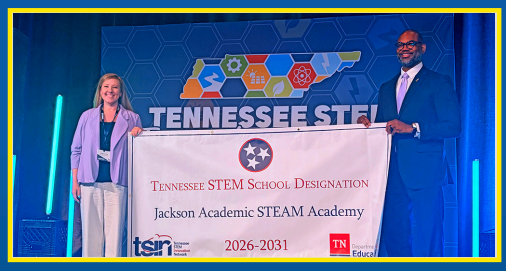
Confidence in the public school system was restored, leading to an influx of families returning to the district and an increase in funding due to student growth, a notable achievement in an era where public schools are seeing declining enrollment. Working closely with the County Legislative Body, Marlon secured $4 million in funding to renovate the open-space classroom high school, transforming it into conducive learning spaces for students.

Our district's demographic is 59% Black, 24% White, 14% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 1% Other. With over 45 different languages spoken, our student body represents a rich tapestry of cultures and backgrounds. However, we also face significant challenges, with 49% of our students economically disadvantaged and 279 experiencing homelessness. Additionally, we serve 2,115 students with special needs and a growing population of English Language Learners.

We have twelve elementary schools, five middle schools, six high schools, and three specialty platforms.



Our commitment to innovation is evident through various unique school models. We offer a PreK-8 Montessori school, one of only two public Montessori schools in Tennessee. At Early College High School at Jackson-Central Merry, students can earn a high school diploma and an associate degree simultaneously– at no cost to families– thanks to our partnership with Jackson State Community College ***(Source: JMCSS TV https://tinyurl.com/jvvd9nxe)***.



In addition to our partnership with the community college, we have collaborations with four other colleges and universities in our community to offer students certifications and dual enrollment opportunities. Our recently built three-story college preparatory school at Madison Academic High School is located on the University of Memphis at Lambuth campus, allowing students to attend both Madison and the University of Memphis. During the global pandemic, our priority was to ensure that we returned students to school as safely and quickly as possible. To support families needing more freedom and flexibility, we created a K-12 virtual school, Jackson Academic STEAM Academy (JASA).

Unlike traditional virtual schools, we designed JASA to include opportunities for students to interact with their peers. With this in mind, we purchased the Union University Distance Learning Center ***(Source: https://tinyurl.com/3965t568)***. Our acquisition of the Union University Distance Learning Center provides a campus experience for JASA students, who can also take dual enrollment courses at Union University ***(Source: JMCSS TV https://tinyurl.com/4nscvwmf)*** and participate in activities such as STEM Robotics Club, Greenpower racing, in-person tutorial sessions, Esports (Source: JMCSS TV https://tinyurl.com/bdzhp8hj) and more.



The newly renovated Jackson-Central Merry High School partners with Lane College to offer a pharmacy technician certification program ***(Source: Youtube https://tinyurl.com/5dakbdmu).*** We also boast a dedicated Pre-K center, an Academic Academy for middle school students at Northeast Middle, and two Tennessee STEM designated schools in Rose Hill and JASA, which is the first virtual school in the state to have STEM designation. ***(Source: JMCSS Press Release https://tinyurl.com/3buv6fpr).***

Furthermore, our Open Enrollment policy allows families to choose schools outside their zoned communities.
Our district's innovation is further demonstrated through the $10 million Innovation School Model grant we received ***(Source: TDOE website: https://tinyurl.com/mr64puxh).*** This grant has allowed us to create Innovation Impact Institutes at each high school and expand them to middle schools, offering programs in BioSTEM, American Law & Justice, Esports, Digital Arts Production, Humanities, Engineering, Hospitality & Tourism, and Advanced Agriculture. The newly renovated Malesus STEM Innovation Center, a school-within-a-school model, provides specialized STEM education .

JMCSS has many collaborative partners; however, through a collective effort with Toyota Tennessee, JMCSS established the Toyota Engineering, Manufacturing & Mechatronics (EM2) Institute at the Malesus STEM Innovation Center ***(Source: JMCSS TV https://tinyurl.com/yc4xrmd2).***



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A Closer Look | JMCSS

GreenpowerUSA electric car racing teams have been established at all middle and high schools, giving students the opportunity to build, race, collect data on, and promote their electric cars at events, including the GreenpowerUSA National Championship at Talladega Speedway, where JMCSS racers took home 2nd and 3rd in the Advanced Stock Race Division in 2024. Rose Hill Middle returned to Talladega in 2026 and claimed the Intermediate Stock Division National Championship.

JMCSS has unique partnerships with businesses throughout the community to offer workforce development opportunities for students.



The LOOP (Local Options and Opportunities Program) program, featured on national Fox News and Fox Business and touted by Governor Bill Lee, offers high school juniors and seniors a unique opportunity to join the workforce while completing their high school studies ***(Source: Jackson Sun https://tinyurl.com/yvfsdkjz).***

We have increased our work-based learning opportunities with local business partners and have created workforce opportunities such as Manufacturing LOOP 1.0, West TN Healthcare LOOP 2.0, Jackson Energy Authority (JEA) LOOP 3.0, and Jackson-Madison County School System LOOP 4.0 ***(Source: JMCSS Communications https://tinyurl.com/ync7kfd5).***



Each of these unique models allows students to complete schoolwork on an adjusted schedule so they can work while gaining valuable experience. LOOP is the true definition of rethinking how, when, and where a student learns while propelling them into the workforce. While we have increased our academic focus, we continue to grow our athletic program. Additional sports have been added at the middle and high school levels as well as expanded options for the newly added elementary sports program. We have many schools bring home state championship titles like the South Side High School girls basketball team. There have been many teams making state appearances since we have invested more in athletics.



While we continue to build our Arts program, we are experiencing a tremendous outpouring of participation in theater, band, music, and art showcases. We have created an Annual Showcase so that our community can see the many talents our students have ***(Source Youtube: https://tinyurl.com/murkkc4c).*** Also, we expanded our theater program to the elementary and middle school students to prepare students for what to expect in high school. Students ranging from ages 5 - 13 who attend any of our elementary and middle schools are eligible to participate and audition for our newly established district wide plays ***(Source: JMCSS TV https://tinyurl.com/y95v5mfh).***

In addition to focusing on improving outcomes and offering students more opportunities, we realized that investing in personnel would be a critical lever. Working collaboratively with the Board, teacher association, central administration team, and our business community, we took a firm stance by committing to investing in employees by creating a competitive salary schedule.



The historic IEP² (Individualized Investment in Every Employee Progression Plan) initiative was established to impact employee recruitment, morale, and retention. The plan ensures competitive salaries for all employees and longevity bonuses based on years of service ***(Source: JMCSS Communications https://tinyurl.com/5n8yfdkr)***. I realized early on that this work is about people, not programs. Therefore, living a healthy and whole life is crucial to the well-being of all employees. With this understanding, we worked collectively to create an innovative health and holistic well-being program called weCARE (C - Connect with others and build meaningful relationships; A - Actively participate in social activities and events; R - Regularly exercise and prioritize physical fitness; E - Engage in self-care practices to support overall well-being). Our incentivized health and holistic well-being initiative encourages all employees to maximize physical activity, self-care, health, financial management, and nutrition.

Additionally, we provide quarterly disbursements for achieving their wellness goals. By encouraging self-care and incentivizing employees to take proper care of themselves, employees can provide the best care and support for students. JMCSS has positioned itself as a standout school district through innovative programming and opportunities for students and employees ***[Source: JMCSS Communications https://www.jmcss.org/wecare].*** These initiatives, and many others, show the district's commitment to adaptability, creativity, and student learning. As JMCSS continues to integrate innovative programs and options for employees and students, it reaffirms its dedication to excellence and ensures that JMCSS students are well-prepared for the challenges and career choices that lie ahead.
As a result of the offerings for students and families, the support for all employees - financially, professionally and health/well-being, our students' academic results have pivoted moving in an upward trajectory.

Now, I will share data that covers my tenure. Teachers' starting salary with a bachelors' degree was $38,000 when I began in 2020-2021. The same starting salary for 2026-2027 is now $54,000.





Preliminary 2026 data show that JMCSS has reached a 94.8% graduation rate—up from 86.3% in 2023 and above Tennessee's latest reported rate of 90.5% in 2025. This continued growth reflects focused support for students as they progress toward graduation. Although the 2026 College and Career Readiness rate had not yet been released when the July data review was prepared, data from 2025 shows a 68.9% College and Career Readiness Rate, which is significantly above where we were in 2020 at 22.6% .

Attendance improved substantially. Districtwide chronic absenteeism declined from 29.7% in 2023 to a preliminary 21.9% in 2026—a 7.8-point decrease. At the high school level, the rate fell from 34.4% to 28.7%; in grades K–8, it declined from 27.8% to 19.3%. Although the district remains above the state's most recently reported all-grades rate of 18.3%, the preliminary results show that our attendance strategies are moving in the right direction. Grades 3–8 achievement also shows sustained progress across multiple subjects. ELA proficiency moved from 22.8% in 2023 to 25.8% in 2026.

Math proficiency increased from 21.5% to 26.1%, while social studies proficiency in grades 6–8 rose from 23.0% to 31.9%. These gains are meaningful, and the data also show that we must continue accelerating progress to close the gap with state proficiency rates.

At the high school level, English II proficiency grew from 29.3% in 2023 to 46.5% in 2026, and Geometry increased from 15.3% to 29.5%. Algebra I improved from 10.9% to 16.5%, and U.S. History rose from 17.5% to 23.4%. English I proficiency was 27.6% in 2026 after reaching 31.0% in 2025, and Algebra II was 16.5% after reaching 17.4% in 2025. These results reinforce the need to scale effective practices while responding directly where performance has slowed. Science assessment results, TVAAS growth data, College and Career Readiness, and overall accountability data were still pending as of July 2026. For that reason, this update does not make final claims about district growth levels, school designations, or 2026 accountability status. Those outcomes will be incorporated once the state releases final data. Our progress has not gone unnoticed. Through Tennessee's TISA funding formula, JMCSS received an additional $1,224,830 tied to student outcomes. This funding supports expanded educational experiences and opportunities for students. I understand that people—not programs and processes alone—are the critical levers in moving student achievement.

That belief continues to drive deep investment in school principals and the educators closest to students. Source: JMCSS 2025–2026 District and School Data, July 2026 (preliminary where noted).

During my tenure with JMCSS, our collaborative leadership culture has helped strengthen continuity among principals. The school board, once fractured, has made significant strides in unity and effectiveness. By working closely with the Board and engaging in continuous professional learning through the Tennessee School Boards Association and the Consortium of State School Boards Associations, we have maintained a shared focus on student success. The Board was honored as Tennessee School Board of the Year for the second time during my tenure **(Source: https://app.smore.com/n/8azc7).** We recognize there is still much work to do. The July 2026 data show both measurable momentum and clear areas for improvement. Through collaboration with industry partners, colleges and universities, families, state organizations, the Board, teachers, leaders, staff, and students, we continue to reclaim our narrative of public school excellence and provide outstanding education for all students. Notable alumni such as Van Jones, CNN contributor, author, and television personality, demonstrate the potential of public education. As a proud graduate of JMCSS, Jones reflects how public schools create access, foster diversity, and empower students to become successful citizens ***(Source: JMCSS TV, https://tinyurl.com/yjths8bh).***

Leadership for Learning

"Explain a strategy you have employed to close a system-level gap in one of the following areas: socioeconomic status, ethnicity, special education or gender. Please use specific data to describe the gap before your strategy was employed and after your strategy was employed. The gap you chose may apply to any student grade-level or subject area. Describe why you believe what you did, rather than something else, led to the change."

> "Attendance is the gateway to everything else."

The gap (before): Chronic absenteeism is one of the clearest predictors of a student falling behind, and our data showed it was hitting our historically underserved students hardest. **For our Black, Hispanic, and Native American students (BHN), nearly a third — 31.1% — were chronically absent. In our high schools, it was worse: more than one in three, 36.6%.**

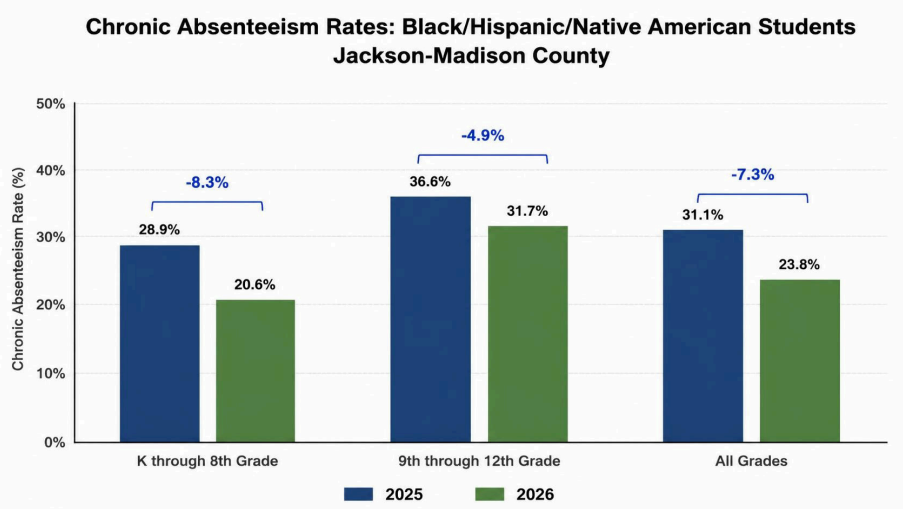
You cannot close an achievement gap when the student isn't in the building. So we named it out loud as a system-level problem.

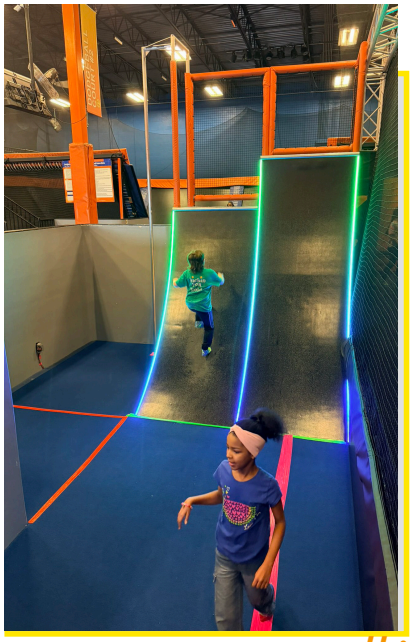
The strategy — and why it's a system, not a single fix: This is the part the rubric rewards, because you can show a coordinated set of moves rather than one lucky lever:

- School-based **truancy teams** designated at each school and held accountable for tracking ***(JMCSS Truancy Data)*** ***https://tinyurl.com/2dufapth***
- Additional truancy officers added to expand reach
- A formal **partnership with Juvenile Court** so there were real supports and consequences
- **King-Sized Rewards — positive reinforcement** celebrating attendance, not just punishing absence ***(King-Sized Rewards Catalog)*** **https://tinyurl.com/2skvup4e**
- ***(Chronic absenteeism reward winner example)*** **https://tinyurl.com/2smeuh8p**
- ***(King-Sized Reward Example)*** ***https://tinyurl.com/msp5rpbb***
- **Weekly tracking** on a heatmap so every school saw its own numbers in near-real-time, and wins were celebrated publicly ***(Heatmap Example)*** ***https://tinyurl.com/3ev3mbx2***.

Our K–8 schools drove the biggest change, an 8.3-point drop, and even our high schools, which are the hardest to move, came down 5 points.

The result (after): In one year, we cut the chronic absenteeism rate for our BHN students by 7.3 percentage points district-wide — from 31.1% down to 23.8%.







https://tinyurl.com/3ans5kt6

Addressing Chronic Absenteeism continued

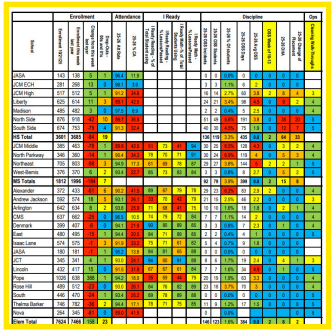
Not only did the BHN subgroup demonstrate remarkable improvement, but overall chronic absenteeism rates also decreased at every school across the district with the exception of one. Compared to 2025 data, 61% of K-8 schools reduced chronic absenteeism by more than five percentage points ***(K-8 Chronic Absenteeism Data)*** **https://tinyurl.com/3jf2jmhz** while the high school with the district's most substantial chronic absenteeism rate achieved a significant 11.3 percentage-point reduction. ***(HS Chronic Absenteeism Data)*** ***https://tinyurl.com/mta5nku***

STUDENT GROUP	GRADE BAND	2025 RATE (PREVIOUS YEAR)	2026 RATE (CURRENT YEAR)	CHANGE (PERCENTAGE POINTS)
ALL STUDENTS	K through 8th	26.3%	19.3%	⬇ -7.0
	9th through 12th	32.7%	28.1%	⬇ -4.6
	All Grades	28.2%	21.9%	⬇ -6.3
BLACK / HISPANIC / NATIVE AMERICAN	K through 8th	28.9%	20.6%	⬇ -8.3
	9th through 12th	36.6%	31.7%	⬇ -4.9
	All Grades	31.1%	23.8%	⬇ -7.3

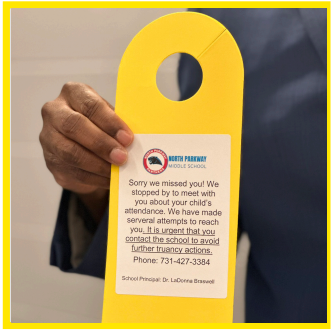
Why this, and not something else (the rubric's key question)? Three reasons I'm confident the strategy caused this...



1. *We paired accountability with incentive — the truancy teams and Juvenile Court partnership raised the the floor, while King-Sized Rewards changed the culture around showing up.*



2. *Second, the weekly heatmap meant we weren't waiting until year-end to find out if it worked; schools adjusted in real time, so the improvement tracks directly to the schools doing the work.*



3. *And third, the biggest gains landed in K–8, exactly where our most intensive truancy-team structure was deployed — the dose matched the response.*

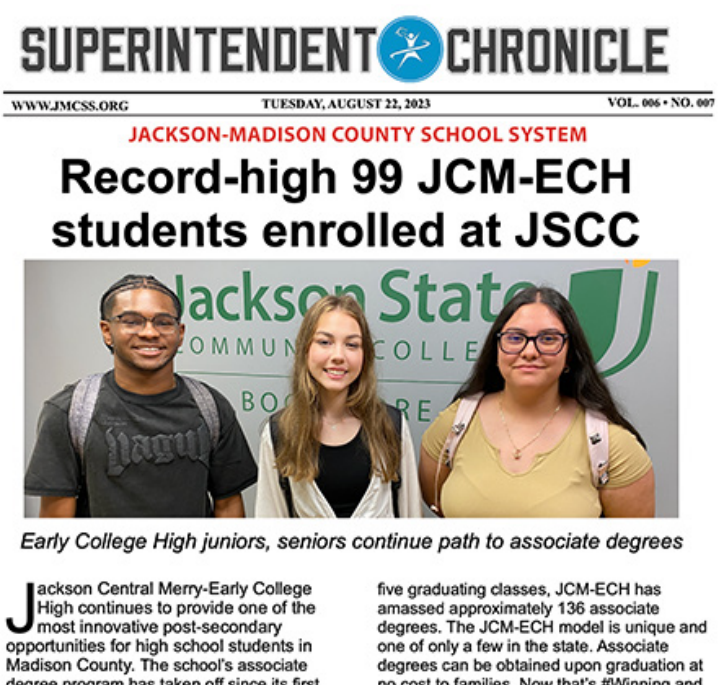
Communication

https://tinyurl.com/3jjdwd3x

LISTEN NOW

Describe the two most effective communication methods to your constituents and how you measure their impact. Also explain how you have brought diverse members of your community together in support of your school district?





SUPERINTENDENT CHRONICLE

WWW.JMCSS.ORG TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2023 VOL. 006 • NO. 007

JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Record-high 99 JCM-ECH students enrolled at JSCC

Early College High juniors, seniors continue path to associate degrees

Jackson Central Merry-Early College High continues to provide one of the most innovative post-secondary opportunities for high school students in Madison County. The school's associate

five graduating classes, JCM-ECH has amassed approximately 136 associate degrees. The JCM-ECH model is unique and one of only a few in the state. Associate degrees can be obtained upon graduation at

My two most effective communication methods cover both ends of the spectrum — the channels we own and the channels the community already trusts. The first is our Superintendent Chronicle.

(Chronicle examples)
https://tinyurl.com/2ntbk5p9

(Chronicle-video edition)
https://tinyurl.com/yscvs2u6

(Chronicle-video edition two)
https://tinyurl.com/yb26ethu

It's our direct line to families, staff, and stakeholders — regular, consistent, straight from my office, with no filter in between. It's how we make sure our families hear our news from us first, in our own voice. And the strength of our whole communications operation isn't just my claim — JMCSS earned seven national communications awards from the National School Public Relations Association, NSPRA

(NSPRA Press Release)
https://shorturl.at/oP9nJ

That's national recognition that we tell our story well. The second is our partnership with the local media outlets this community respects and pays attention to — WBBJ

(WBBJ story)
https://tinyurl.com/ud2rbhxn, 101.1, and our local publications. The Chronicle reaches the people who already follow us; these partnerships carry our story to the people who don't — the grandparent who watches the evening news, the commuter listening to the radio, the family that isn't on our email list yet.

WATCH NOW

https://tinyurl.com/mudzp885



I've worked to build genuine, trusted relationships with those outlets so that when there's news in our district — good or hard — they come to us first and we're a reliable source. That earned credibility is something you can't manufacture; you build it over time by being honest and accessible.

As for how I measure impact: for the Chronicle, it's reach and engagement — open rates and how our subscriber base grows. For the media partnerships, it's the breadth of coverage and how often we're the trusted source on a story.

Effective leadership
Board Collaboration

How do you provide effective leadership for your school district and public education with such challenges as CRT, textbook controversies and other political agendas? How do you collaborate with your school board and address these issues?

The way I lead through politically charged issues — CRT, textbook controversies, outside agendas — is to keep the main thing the main thing. My job, and my board's job, is to stay anchored to two questions: what does the law and our approved standards require, and what's actually best for our 13,000 kids? When you keep returning to those, the political noise doesn't knock you off course.

JMCSS Board named TSBA School Board of the Year

The clearest evidence that this works is our board itself. The Jackson-Madison County School Board was named TSBA School Board of the Year ***(Source: JMCSS Press Release)*** ***https://app.smore.com/n/8azc7***

We earned it by documenting our work in policy development and collaboration across teams, and it reflects the board's commitment to ongoing professional development in governance ***(Source: JMCSS TV)*** ***https://tinyurl.com/2fs2zrxm***

That matters here more than people realize: a board that invests real hours in learning how to govern is a board that stays disciplined when emotions run high.

They know the difference between a governance decision and a political one, and they hold that line. So when a controversial issue comes to us, we don't litigate it in the headlines. We follow Tennessee law and our standards adoption process transparently, we listen to our community with genuine respect because people care deeply about their kids, and then we make the decision that serves students. My role is to give the board clean information and clear options so their training translates into sound, defensible decisions — and to take the public heat so they can focus on governing.



And our board ties it back to outcomes themselves. When we won the award, our vice chairman didn't talk about politics — he talked about our students and the results we're getting for them. That tells you where this board's head is. We're aligned not because we always agree, but because we share the same north star: every decision gets measured against what's best for kids. That alignment is what lets us weather any controversy that comes our way.







Community Engagement

Across the nation, school districts continue to struggle with the lack of appropriate funding. What action have you taken to continue to provide a quality education for your students in spite of these shortages? How did you engage your community stakeholders to win their support? What innovative solutions have you implemented in your school district?

WATCH NOW

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4HIwtUXTnQ

Like every district in the country, we don't have all the funding we'd like — so my approach has two parts: be an extraordinary steward of the dollars we do have and aggressively diversify the dollars coming in from outside.

On stewardship — when I arrived, the most important thing we had to rebuild was financial credibility. Over my tenure we've grown our fund balance by $20 million.



Now, I want to be clear about what that is and isn't. That's not money sitting in a drawer instead of going to kids. It's the financial stability that lets us weather enrollment shifts and changes in state funding without cutting programs or laying off teachers mid-year. And just as importantly, it rebuilt the trust of our funding body.



When the County Commission sees a district managing its money responsibly, they invest more — and they have. Good stewardship isn't the opposite of serving kids; it's what makes serving kids sustainable.

That credibility is exactly what lets me engage our stakeholders and bring in outside resources. A few examples. We built the JMCSS Education Foundation as a permanent vehicle for community investment in our schools ***(ACT 30+ Luncheons/Liberty stage upgrades).https://tinyurl.com/4xjz72pm***

Our annual JMCSS Gala ***(Gala photos)https://tinyurl.com/4sce66k8*** brings the major companies in our community to the table — and the proceeds flow into a special projects fund at the Community Foundation of West Tennessee that we direct toward high-impact needs.

We secured a $100,000 grant from Toyota Tennessee ***(Toyota Press Release)*** https://shorturl.at/RZ4aF to launch the engineering and mechatronics institute at our Malesus STEM center ***(Toyota Expansion Press Release).***https://shorturl.at/RZ4aF

And we made the case to our County Commission to fund $50,000 toward our innovative STAR Teacher Grant Program ***(STAR Press Release), https://shorturl.at/ChTUK*** investing directly in the educators who move our kids.

You don't win a Toyota grant or a commission investment by asking — you win it by showing results and stewardship. We earned the community's confidence, and that confidence converts into resources for our students. That's the engine that lets us deliver a quality education in spite of the shortages every district faces.




JMCSS
JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM