

The Spirit of Excellence



2023-2024



MARCHING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE



**JACKSON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Transforming lives through
excellent education

About JPS

Jackson Public Schools is the third-largest school district in Mississippi, serving over 18,000 scholars, representing more than 80 percent of school-aged children in the state's capital and only urban municipality. Jackson, Mississippi has about 170,000 residents in an area of 104 square miles. There are 46 schools which include 7 high schools, 9 middle schools, 30 elementary schools along with 4 special program schools. These schools are divided into 7 feeder patterns based on the high school receiving the area's scholars.

Vision

At Jackson Public Schools, we prepare scholars to achieve globally, to contribute locally, and to be fulfilled individually.

Mission

At Jackson Public Schools, we develop scholars through world-class learning experiences to attain an exceptional knowledge base, critical and relevant skill sets, and the necessary dispositions for great success.

Core Values

At Jackson Public Schools, we believe in the importance of equity, excellence, growth mindset, relationships, relevance, and a positive and respectful culture.

Points of Pride

- An increase in reading proficiency to 34.3%, marking a 7.2% increase since 2019.
- Mathematics proficiency reached a record high of 30.4%, up by 6.6% since 2019.
- An improvement in proficiency across all grade levels and subjects.
- The presence of robust academic and performing arts programs throughout the JPS district.
- Over \$22,188,710 was secured in grant funding, which has been allocated towards academic initiatives, social-emotional learning (SEL), electric buses, and more.
- Bond projects aimed at enhancing schools and facilities for the benefit of our parents and students.
- A commitment to building stronger teams by actively recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers.
- Implementation of successful interactive summer camp programming.

Welcome to JPS



As the superintendent of Jackson Public Schools, I am thrilled to share with you the great accomplishments of our scholars and team members, as we celebrate the 2024 Spirit of Excellence. Our continued academic growth, innovative programming, and school facility improvements are some of the many achievements that we are proud of. I would like to take a moment to thank the parents and community members, whose support has made all of this possible.

The Spirit of Excellence recognizes the outstanding efforts of our scholars and team members and helps us create a positive and respectful culture within the district. We are proud to showcase our rock stars and invite everyone to join us in celebrating them.

If you are new to Jackson Public Schools, we extend you a warm welcome and invite you to visit our website (www.jackson.k12.ms.us) or follow us on our social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn) for more information. As a school district, we face many challenges and pressures, and it is essential to share positive stories about our scholars and schools with the community. We hope you will join us in spreading the good news about JPS because there's undoubtedly lots to tell.

Join us as we Transform Lives through Excellent Education.

Board of Trustees



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Lanier Junior Senior High School Class of 2025

"We change the world, not by what we say or do but as a consequence of what we have become."

—David R. Hawkins

At Lanier Junior Senior High School, I have evolved into an exceptional student and feel inspired by this quote. My time has been marked by memorable connections with teachers, counselors, coaches, and friends who have challenged me to be a lifelong learner with a growth mindset. This high school has afforded me more opportunities than I could have ever imagined.

During my tenure at Lanier, I have joined various organizations such as the Student Government Association, 100 Black Men of Jackson, The United Way, Mississippi Secretary of State (SOS) Office, and Jackson Public School Superintendent Representatives, just to name a few. Because I held these positions while remaining a scholarly athlete and worked under the guidance of admirable leaders, I gained the trust of my classmates. This helped me win a position in multiple school elections such as Mr. Freshman 2021-22, Mr. Sophomore 2022-23, and now, Mr. Junior for the 2023-2024 school year. I was also a recipient of WAPT 16's Player of the Week! I appreciate Lanier's compassionate and supportive teachers who aren't judgemental and are always there to assist students as needed. They have had a huge impact on my success at Lanier. Because of all the teachers, counselors, coaches, and friends who helped me get here, I will forever stand in solidarity with the Bulldog Nation continuing to embody a spirit of excellence.

I plan to study Physical Therapy after graduation and join a college football team.





Kendarius Robinson

Provine High School
Class of 2025

"A secret to happiness is letting every situation be what it is instead of what you think it should be and making the best of it."

My name is Kendarius Robinson and I attend Provine High School. At Provine, I play baseball and swim on the Jackson Public Schools swim team. My favorite subject is math, and my favorite educator is my history teacher because of the way she leads and interacts with her students.

At the start of my time at Provine, it was hard to adjust because of the new environment. I felt shy and nervous most of the time, but the staff helped me find my place here. This was possible because of the full support that I received from teachers and administrators. They pushed me to keep going in everything I did. Because of them, I was inspired to set goals this year and have already accomplished some of them! One of the goals that I crushed this year was to maintain the AB honor roll which I'm very proud of. My experience at Provine High School has truly been wonderful.

After high school, I plan to attend Mississippi State University and major in Aerospace Engineering.





O'shari Hicks

Jim Hill High School
Class of 2024

"To be young, black, and gifted." - Chadwick Boseman

Jim Hill has contributed to the way I present myself to the world by helping me become a better version of myself.

My favorite part about Jim Hill is the sense of community and love we have for each other. We are one big family. I love all of my peers and learning alongside them every day. My favorite subjects are History and English. The best part of our community is the passionate and educated teachers. They remain respectful and encouraging to help us reach our fullest potential. Because of this, I have felt confident in expressing my creative abilities such as contributing to my school's yearbook. I was also crowned Miss Senior for the 2023-24 school year.

One of my best memories at Jim Hill was creating our news channel, "What's Real at The Hill." Having a media outlet and creating original content has always been a dream of mine. When my school gave me the chance to build this platform and connect with my peers, it opened a new world before me.

I plan to major in Public Relations and Marketing and minor in Political Science at Jackson State University. After graduating from JSU, I plan to start a career in film production.





Phoenix Hicks

Forest Hill High School Class of 2026

“Going to Forest Hill has allowed me to spread my wings, meet some amazing individuals, and showcase all that I’m capable of.”

Forest Hill has provided me with a team of supporters who are always wishing the best for me. Every day, I am grateful to learn alongside and be taught by so many incredible people. I was chosen to be a charter member and historian of my school’s Science National Honor Society. I have had some great opportunities here, including the fortune of taking dual credit courses as a sophomore, which is usually reserved for juniors and seniors.

The best part about attending Forest Hill High School has been meeting so many wonderful people. I will never forget the amazing friends I have made, as well as the relationships I have built with my teachers.

After high school, I plan to attend a Historically Black College or University and study fashion design and merchandising.





Tyler Arrington

Wingfield High School
Class of 2024

“The best thing about my school is that every instructor treats you with respect and love.”

When I started 9th grade at Wingfield High School, classes were virtual due to COVID-19. I thought the transition from middle to high school would be a bit challenging, but my teacher made sure that each student had a chance to learn and grow. When I saw their commitment to students during the pandemic, I knew that Wingfield was the place for me.

The connection I have with the teachers and staff at my school has helped me feel like a winner no matter what the situation. One of the highlights of my experiences has been my selection to the royal court. It was a surreal experience that opened the door for students to execute ideas for future school events. Wingfield also allowed me to take dual enrollment classes, which not only helped my GPA but gave me a head start in college. I thought dual enrollment classes would be intimidating, but my professors outlined all the instructions which made it easier for me.

A major lesson that I learned from Wingfield High School is to give everything your best shot even when you think you should not.





Whitney Starr Jones

JPS - Tougaloo Early College High School Class of 2024

“This is not just a school or program-it has become a constant comfort and a reminder of the greatness my generation possesses.”

Entering high school, I felt worried about being able to branch out and become comfortable with who I was and who I wanted to become. However, J-TECHS is the exact kind of environment and family that I needed to thrive.

Advocacy and student leadership are at the forefront of what it means to be a J-TECHS student. We are taught that leaders are not simply titleholders. We are a community that thrives on the remarkable minds of young people and their ambitions, which is why J-TECHS aims to involve its students in both their learning and overall school experience.

I have held leadership positions in numerous activities in and out of the classroom. I'm proud to serve as the 2023-24 J-TECHS Miss Senior and I have been involved in the Student Government Association since my freshman year. I currently serve as a Tougaloo College Jackson Free Clinic Health Ambassador and Teen Health Mississippi MyCouncilwoman, which helps me explore my passion for medicine and public health.

My time as a J-TECHS scholar has afforded me opportunities I could only dream of. My passions and pursuits are encouraged rather than diminished. My goals and accomplishments are celebrated instead of dismissed.

My classmates, teachers, and administrators are some of the most remarkable individuals I have ever met, and I thank God for creating them and placing them in my life. From late-night Zoom calls to marvelous talent shows and Friendsgivings, the joy that my school brings me is out of this world. We are not just a representation of ourselves or our parents, but of the Jackson Public Schools community and what true JPS scholars are.

I plan to double major in biomedical engineering and public health to become a gynecologic oncologist and researcher.



Shelby Hadley

Murrah High School
Class of 2024

*1 Corinthians 13: 4-5 "Love is kind, love is patient.
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

I currently serve as the 2023-2024 Miss Murrah High School. This honor has allowed me to engage with all students and get to know them. I am also a member of the Speech and Debate team and the Ida B. Wells APAC Theatre program. I have served as Head Captain of the Murrah High School Cheer Team for the past two years and am a member of the National Honor Society and an International Thespian Society officer. One of my favorite roles includes my work on the 2023-2024 State Superintendent Student Advisory Council where I am a voice for students across Mississippi.

Because of the nurturing of our educators and administrators, I have been able to hold these positions and fulfill my duties in the best way possible. They have all helped me blossom into the person I am today. Kindness, patience, and love are the attributes that the teachers of Murrah High School show their students.

Throughout my high school career, my goal has been to be active and involved. I ensure I tackle all my leadership roles as best I can and represent my school to the highest standard. The lessons I have gained from being at "The Only Place to Be" help to fulfill my dream of serving others.





Faquavious Sutton

Callaway High School
Class of 2024

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

Growing up in an environment where I was the oldest of four children and only older cousins around me, there was always a time when I longed for someone I could relate to. Everyone desires to be understood and have a certain level of common ground with those around them, but not everyone takes the initiative to change for the better to have these good connections.

My 11th grade English teacher constantly made us write, which as a student isn't something that you like to hear, but it gave me a way to put my thoughts into words on paper. Being able to do this has made me realize how much I enjoy the subject of English and the act of writing. Even writing this statement on the impact that Callaway has had on me is a benefit from a connection I made. Without Ms. Williams, I would not have been given the opportunity or skills to write this.

The best part of school is the memories and connections that you can make along the way. My most memorable school experiences would always include the times that school has allowed me to spend with friends and people who are similar to me.

Through my many years of being in school, I've learned that all it takes is a small change for something bigger and better to happen to you. Being able to make these small changes in my life has paid off in big ways.

My future plans are to attend Jackson State University and major in Computer Science.





Gabriel Williams

Male Scholar-Athlete

Bailey Magnet Middle School

"My favorite athlete is the Argentinian soccer player, Lionel Messi."

I am an 8th-grade student at Bailey Magnet Middle School (Murrah High School). I am an A student and was ranked #2 in the Top 10 percent of my 7th grade class.

Academics are my first and main priority. I took the ACT for the first time in 7th grade and scored a composite score of 21. Although I attend Bailey Magnet, my skills, and work ethic have gotten me a position on the Murrah High School Varsity team and club teams, Mississippi Rush and International Futbol Club. I lead all of my teams in assists, am a consistent goal scorer, and display great leadership skills. I enjoy reading, coding, chess, STEM, and playing video games with his friends.

My aspirations after high school are to either attend MIT or Stanford University, where I plan to major in Computer Science while continuing to play soccer.





De’Jah Granderson

Female Scholar-Athlete Callaway High School

“I am a triple threat and I know it.”

As a smart female athlete, I am a triple threat that accomplishes any goal- big or small- that I set my mind to.

My high school GPA is currently 4.5 and my college GPA is 3.82. I am a member of the 25+ ACT Club and I had a perfect score on the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program. Since Pre-Kindergarten, I have achieved Honor Roll.

I have been basketball Co-Captain for two seasons and was dubbed as the most defensive player. I am also the undefeated JPS Junior Varsity Champion.

On road trips or before and after basketball practice, I always keep my Chromebook on hand to study and complete assignments. I see academics and sports as a chance to push my body and mind beyond what I think I can do.

After high school, I plan to attend college and graduate from a top engineering program.





Charles Travis

2024 JROTC Cadet of the Year



I am the 2023-2024 Jackson Public School District Cadet of the Year. I was promoted to the rank of cadet colonel on February 22, 2023, and will serve as the JPSD JROTC cadet brigade commander for the 2023-2024 school year. As a junior at Callaway High School, I currently serve as the 4th Battalion supply & logistics officer. I am an outstanding scholar, and leader who is highly dedicated, goal-oriented, and works diligently toward my passions. I believe that to be a successful leader, you'll need to respect authority, have an ethical mindset 24/7, and have the courage to take on new responsibilities and face new challenges every day in life.

When I set my mind on a specific outcome, I strive for perfection and take the responsibility of working hard until my goal is met. I credit my family, instructors, and community for always pushing me to become the best version of myself. As a Cadet Colonel, I have been very active within JROTC throughout all of my years in high school. I participate as a member of the Callaway JROTC Drill Team, Color Guard Detail, and the Cadet Leadership Staff. I am also a member of the National Junior Honor Society, Charger Bolt Newspaper Staff, girls' varsity soccer, and girls' track and field.

Areial Thomas

First Year Teacher
Jim Hill High School



Areial Thomas is a 9th-grade teacher at Jim Hill High School. She attended Millsaps College, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing and Communication Studies.

“Jim Hill High School is not just a workplace for me, said Thomas. “Jim Hill is my alma mater – a true breeding ground for success. I love teaching here because I get to usher scholars, academically and emotionally, to new heights. Every day, I look forward to helping scholars recognize their place in the world and broadening their perspectives outside of cultural norms.”

Areial is most grateful for her administrators and the English Department. “They are always so helpful and patient with me,” said Thomas. They are the best at what they do. I hope to accomplish at least half of what they have accomplished during my own educational career.”

Ms. T, as she is affectionally called, is an advocate for mental health and overall wellness. She believes that before we try to teach anybody’s scholar, we must understand that we cannot pour from an empty cup. She emphasizes the importance of finding a work-life balance. That is her advice to anyone who wants to truly be impactful.

Administrator of the Year



Dr. Sara Harper
McWillie Elementary

Dr. Sara Harper is an 11-year principal of McWillie Elementary and serves as a principal mentor for the Division I Elementary Team of Jackson Public Schools.

Born in Sioux City, Iowa, Dr. Sara Harper relocated to Jackson, Mississippi in 1996. Following her graduation from Millsaps College in 2000, she began her teaching career with JPS where she has dedicated 24 years of service. Dr. Harper earned her master's degree in counseling from Jackson State University and later achieved her Doctor of Education Leadership from Mississippi College.

Dr. Harper holds a significant role on the Mississippi Department of Education Principal Advisory Council. Throughout her tenure in the Jackson Public School District, she earned the distinction of Teacher of the Year at both Lee Elementary, where she served as an exceptional education teacher, and McWillie Elementary, where she taught in the Montessori program.

In 2016, Dr. Harper completed the Leadership Greater Jackson program and has since remained an active board member. She is a graduate and board member of the Millsaps College Principals' Summer Institute. Committed to community service, Dr. Harper has been a member of the Junior League of Jackson since 2018 and currently serves on the board for The First Tee of Central Mississippi.

Teacher of the Year



Alesia White
Van Winkle Elementary School

With 11 years of teaching experience, Alesia White is a proud pre-kindergarten teacher at Van Winkle Elementary and holds pivotal roles as Student and Family Engagement coordinator, team leader, and mentor for novice teachers at her school. She began her career at the Center for Child Development at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Ms. White holds a master's degree in early childhood education from Jackson State University and a bachelor's degree in Child and Family Studies. She is actively pursuing National Board Certification in Early Childhood.

Ms. White's educational philosophy centers on fostering scholars' growth through developmentally appropriate experiences in a safe and nurturing environment. She believes in the unique potential of each child, emphasizing positive relationships with both students and their families. Viewing children as active learners, Ms. White encourages meaningful play in her classroom, promoting curiosity, discovery, and problem-solving. Her goal is to continue playing a pivotal role in the lives of young scholars, nurturing their success and development in her classroom.

Beyond the classroom, Ms. White is a dedicated church volunteer, particularly involved in various roles in support of children. She extends her commitment by volunteering with the Parent Academy Program, offering free materials to parents of three- to five-year-olds for home-based readiness practices. She also secures essential resources through mini-grants with a track record of 15 funded grants. Additional noteworthy achievements include contributing to the establishment of Jackson Public Schools' first all-pre-kindergarten school, receiving the Rock Star Award for 2021-2022 and 2023-2024, and being honored with the 2023 Ask for More Jackson Outstanding Educator Award.

Parent of the Year



Celestial Gordon-Griffin
Tougaloo College

Celestial Gordon-Griffin is a supermom as well as the Program Director for the Bennie G. Thompson Delta Leadership Program at Tougaloo College. Gordon-Griffin is the daughter of Bishop L. B. and the Late Peggy Gordon. She is married to Arlyn Griffin, and together they have a blended family of four (Ariel Hunt, Taj Sanders, Aniyah Griffin, and Arlyn Devon Griffin). A native of Jackson, Mrs. Gordon-Griffin is a proud product of Jackson Public Schools. She's a graduate of Callaway High School and Tougaloo College, and she is currently pursuing a master's degree in political science at Tougaloo.

An advocate for teachers and education, Mrs. Gordon-Griffin has always been active in her role as a support parent to the schools in which her children attend. She works tirelessly in her community, from teaching and advocating for homeownership for black and brown individuals to

holding voter registration drives and inspiring the next generation of leaders.

In 2005, Mrs. Gordon-Griffin co-founded Tools of Hope, a non-profit that was started to help Hurricane Katrina victims who relocated to Jackson. Understanding the financial constraints that parents of Hurricane Katrina students were facing, she knew the importance of making the transition of coming to Jackson as smooth as possible. So, she raised funds and had over 500 uniforms donated to JPS for the students who were victims of Hurricane Katrina.

In 2024, Tools of Hope now focuses on the Warming Hearts Blanket initiative and Peggy's Toy Chest. Warming Hearts blesses homeless individuals during the Christmas season with a blanket and a care package to let them know that they are seen and loved. Peggy's Toy Chest is based in Flora, Mississippi, where her family hosts an annual toy giveaway in honor of her late mother, ensuring no child is without a gift on Christmas. Service, gratefulness, and compassion are three things she lives by.

District Leader of the Year



Dr. Wanda L. Clark
Office of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Wanda L. Clark is the Director of Instructional Support Services in the Office of Teaching and Learning.

Originally from Tchula, Mississippi, she earned her bachelor's degree from Jackson State University and further pursued her education, obtaining a master's degree from Belhaven University. Dr. Clark also holds specialist and doctorate degrees in Educational Leadership from Mississippi College. With over 23 years of experience, she takes pride in her role as an educator.

One notable achievement in Dr. Clark's career is her tenure as the principal of Sykes Elementary School, during which she and her team successfully transformed the school from a failing to a thriving institution. Dr. Clark firmly believes in providing a high-quality education for all scholars, emphasizing the responsibility of educators to ensure they receive it. Guided by Maya

Angelou's words, she values the lasting impact of how individuals make others feel and endeavors to serve with dignity and respect.

Beyond her role as a principal, Dr. Clark has served in various capacities, including assistant principal, curriculum specialist, master teacher, Cornerstone literacy coach, and classroom teacher. While acknowledging the challenges of educating scholars, she emphasizes that it is not only hard work but, more importantly, "heart" work. Driven by a sense of joy, she finds fulfillment in dedicating herself to this meaningful work each day.

Support Staff of the Year



Ella Pepper

Facilities Operations Custodian Supervisor

Ella Pepper serves as the Facilities Operations Custodian Supervisor overseeing the north zone of Jackson Public Schools. A native of Bolton, Mississippi, she pursued Business Technology at Hinds Community College after graduating from Raymond High School.

Her connection with JPS dates to 2010 when her children attended Hardy Middle School. Following a basketball game cleanup with the late Mr. Fred Sutton, then head custodian, she felt inspired to join JPS. Ms. Pepper's journey evolved from head custodian at Cardozo Middle School to custodian foreman (January 2013) and custodian supervisor (July 2023) due to her unwavering commitment, hard work, and collaborative skills with school leaders.

Ms. Pepper's daily dedication extends beyond her official role. She contributes to establishing best practices in facility operations, acts as a trainer for staff, and serves as a role model for her team. Sandra Robinson, executive director of Facilities and Operations, describes Ms. Pepper as a servant leader who leads by example. Her passion for motivating staff and performing selfless acts, from training on computer applications to stepping in during staff shortages, exemplifies her commitment to the District at all levels.

JPS Counselor of the Year



Dr. Edna Sampson-Washington

Jim Hill High School

Dr. Edna Sampson-Washington, a counselor at Jim Hill High School, was named the 2023-2024 Counselor of the Year. She has served in education for over 20 years, with 15 years as a professional school counselor. Dr. Sampson has made a lifelong commitment to empowering our community youth. She works daily to ensure that every scholar she encounters feels valued and respected. As an educator, her priority is to impart to her students a sense of responsibility to help prepare them to take on active roles as engaged and successful citizens. Dr. Sampson believes that the foundation for success as an adult is built during one's primary and secondary education years. She is committed to molding our community's future leaders to ensure that the torch is carried on for generations to come. She cultivates a positive and respectful culture amongst her students and colleagues, prioritizes building relationships and encourages those around her to not only embrace but exhibit a growth mindset to their goals.

Dr. Sampson is a proud four-time graduate of Jackson State University. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration, a Master of Arts in Teaching, Specialist in Education as well as a Doctor of Education in Early Childhood Education. She is a member of the American School Counselor Association, Magnolia State School Counselor Association, National Education Association, and the Junior Auxiliary of Clinton.

A Night of Stars



Join Our Amazing Team

Are you looking for a career where you can make a deep impact on the lives of students, work with amazing colleagues, and build a great career?

We're on an exciting journey in Jackson Public Schools. Come join us in our journey!

The Jackson Public School District is seeking highly-qualified, committed, and dedicated applicants for teaching positions for the 2024-2025 school year.

JPS is:

- The third largest public school district in Mississippi with over 18,000 scholars.
- Located in the historic capital city of Mississippi—also known as the “City with Soul.”
- A provider of competitive salary and benefits.
- A place where there are plenty of career ladder opportunities.

What kind of opportunities are you interested in?

- Instructional
- Paraprofessional
- Leadership
- Non-instructional

JPS has many options for you. Are you ready to apply now for a position?

If you have questions, we're here to help. Contact the JPS Office of Recruitment for more information. Call (601) 985-3159.

We invite your sincere partnership as we work to transform lives through excellent education.



APPLY NOW!

Excellence In Action



662

Jackson Public Schools
Administrative Offices



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Transforming lives through
excellent education