

Southerners for Fair School Funding Mississippi INSPIRE Review

Comparison of MAEP and INSPIRE

Background

Southerners for Fair School Funding, which is powered by Ed Trust – Tennessee, is an initiative that supports organizations and advocates across the South who are building a movement to fairly fund every school. We believe states must create school funding formulas that are transparent, fair, and clearly provide for the needs of individual students.

Our goal is for states to build a simplified, student-weighted funding formula guided by students' different levels of need with the goals of eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps. We aim for states to create adequate, equitable, and transparent formulas that provide clear dollar allocations by assigning additional “weights” for students from low-income families, English learners, students with disabilities, and rural students.

Mississippi School Funding

Using criteria developed based on research, best practice, and **what we believe**, Southerners for Fair School Funding provides ratings for each Southern state. In February 2024, we provided state ratings based on the Mississippi Adequate Education Program. More recently, the Mississippi Legislature has been focused on updating the state's education formula through the House Bill 1453, called “Investing in the Needs of Students to Prioritize, Impact, and Reform Education” (INSPIRE). The INSPIRE Act would increase the funding students receive through a weighted student-based funding formula.

Below we provide both our original rating for MAEP and an updated rating for INSPIRE. These ratings allow for Mississippi stakeholders to understand more about how these two funding formulas would impact students.

Five Meaningful Changes in Mississippi's INSPIRE

The proposed changes to Mississippi's school funding formula under the INSPIRE Act are critical updates to the state's current system. If INSPIRE is passed, Mississippi's formula would improve in five areas.

Mississippi's INSPIRE Act would:



1. As a student-weighted formula, begin with a clear dollar amount for every student and increase that amount with "weights," or percentage boosts, for students in particular categories.
2. Increase funding for student poverty by establishing a student poverty weight which would be one of the highest poverty weights in the Southeast.
3. Further bolster funding for student poverty by creating a concentrated poverty weight that would send even more dollars to districts where 35% or more students live in poverty, making Mississippi one of five states in the Southeast to address the impact of concentrated poverty.
4. Create specific weights for English learners and create weights to fund the varying needs of students with disabilities.
5. Make it easier for families, educators, policymakers, and education stakeholders to track how students are funded and where taxpayer dollars are utilized.














Ratings for Mississippi





MEETS CRITERIA

PARTIALLY MEETS CRITERIA

DOESN'T MEET CRITERIA

	MAEP RATING	INSPIRE RATING	RATIONALE
FUND STUDENTS ADEQUATELY			
The funding formula is student-based, or weighted			While MAEP is a hybrid funding model, INSPIRE moves to a student-based model

	MAEP RATING	INSPIRE RATING	RATIONALE
Per-pupil funding is adequate enough for students to achieve average, national test scores		TBD	While INSPIRE increases the overall funding, it is unclear if it will be enough to move this measure
FUND STUDENT NEEDS APPROPRIATELY			
Formula includes a weight or additional funding for students living in poverty			INSPIRE would increase the weighting for poverty from 5% to 30% <small>(NOTE: Green starts at 100%)</small>
Formula includes a weight or additional funding for English learners			INSPIRE would introduce a weight for EL students funded at 20% <small>(NOTE: Green starts at 100%)</small>
Formula includes a weight or additional funding for students with disabilities			INSPIRE would add a three-tiered system that accounts for level of student disability
Formula includes a weight or additional funding for sparse and/or isolated districts			While INSPIRE would update this measure to focus on students per square mile, a 5% weight is not adequate
Formula includes weights or additional funding for districts with high levels of concentrated poverty			INSPIRE would create a new 10% weight; however, that is not a generous weight.
FUND SCHOOL DISTRICTS EQUITABLY			
State caps how much local revenue districts can raise to limit between-district disparities in local revenue			INSPIRE would not make any changes to the state's policy on local revenue caps

	MAEP RATING	INSPIRE RATING	RATIONALE
FUND STUDENTS TRANSPARENTLY			
State annually publishes information about how the funding system is designed to work in clear, plain language		TBD	Public reporting is not yet discussed in INSPIRE
State reports school spending data in alignment with equity-oriented principles		TBD	Public reporting is not yet discussed in INSPIRE
PUBLIC FUNDS FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS			
Taxpayer funds are used to maintain and support public schools exclusively			INSPIRE would focus on funding for public schools and does not address vouchers. Current ESA and scholarship policies will not change