

CONCLUSION: A review of the operations programs for 50 Mississippi school districts in FY 2023 showed opportunities for districts to strengthen their programs and increase efficiency. For example, 31 reporting districts (63%) did not have a formal preventative maintenance program. Without such a program, districts risk unexpected and potentially costly issues with their facilities and equipment. There was also wide variance in the performance of districts in key areas such as custodial cost per square foot and maintenance cost per square foot, suggesting that districts have room for improvement. As a whole, reporting districts performed favorably compared to regional and national peers in certain areas (e.g., custodial costs), while districts underperformed peers in other areas (e.g., maintenance costs).



BACKGROUND

In FY 2025, PEER received funding to contract with Glimpse K12 (now Level Data) to conduct a comparative review of 50 school districts. This report focuses on one of six non-instructional areas of review—operations (Volume V). Other non-instructional reports include:

- Finance and Supply Chain (Volume I);
- Human Resources (Volume II);
- Information Technology (Volume III);
- Nutrition (Volume IV); and,
- Transportation (Volume VI).

- Reporting districts performed favorably on custodial cost measures compared to regional peers (e.g., lower custodial cost per square foot and per student); however, districts spent more on maintenance costs per square foot than did regional peers.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Of the 49 reporting districts, 23 (47%) did not utilize an electronic maintenance work order system.**
Such systems could increase efficiency and enhance decision making.
- **Of reporting districts, 31 (63%) did not have a formal preventative maintenance program.**
Without such a program, districts risk unexpected and potentially costly issues with their facilities and equipment.
- **Of reporting districts, 31 (63%) did not participate in an energy management program.**
An energy management program that involves principals and facility leaders could lead to savings and environmental sustainability.
- **18 (37%) did not conduct a formal facilities assessment each year.**
Such assessments are intended to ensure building safety and can assist administrators in prioritizing repairs and upgrades.

Variance in District Performance

Districts reported a wide range of costs and performance associate with custodial, maintenance, and groundskeeping services. For example:

- Custodial cost per square foot ranged from \$0.37 in Starkville Oktibbeha to \$3.95 in Pontotoc County, with a median of \$1.37.
- Maintenance cost per square foot ranged from \$0.77 in Pontotoc County to \$10.31 in Amory, with a median of \$4.27.

These wide variances suggest that districts have opportunities to improve their performance on the key indicators in this report, which could result in improved efficiencies, cost savings, and/or improved service levels.

Issues with Missing Data

The conclusions of this report were inhibited by district's inability to provide the requested data. For example:

- 16 districts (32%) did not provide the data needed to determine the custodial cost per student or reported data that could not be clarified and therefore was excluded from the analysis (see Exhibit 4 on page 15);
- 18 districts (36%) did not provide the data needed to determine the custodial supply cost per square foot or provided data that could not be clarified and therefore was excluded (see Exhibit 5 on page 17); and,
- 28 districts (56%) did not provide the total number of acres on their school campuses or the number of groundskeeper FTEs (see Exhibit 10 on page 27).
- Aberdeen failed to provide any data for this review.

The failure to either collect and/or provide information on key indicators for this review suggests that district administrators do not have the information they need to make decisions regarding their operations functions.

Cost Savings

Based on FY 2023 data reported, of the districts reporting, 26 districts could realize annual projected potential cost savings of up to \$17 million by reducing costs associated with their custodial, maintenance, and/or groundskeeping functions.

While the reported data suggests the potential for cost savings for these districts, each district's administration should carefully review the data and recommendations in light of the particular circumstances of the district.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS

1. In FY 2026, each district's superintendent, in consultation with the district's operations personnel, should review the information from this report and implement the relevant recommendations to increase efficiency, improve service levels, and/or achieve cost savings. Such recommendations include, but are not limited to:
 - a. implementing an electronic work order system;
 - b. conducting formal annual facility assessments;
 - c. implementing an energy management program; and,
 - d. implementing a formal preventative maintenance program.
2. For districts that were unable to provide certain information during this review pertaining to their operations, relevant district personnel should begin collecting and monitoring this data on an ongoing basis.
3. If feasible, districts should begin tracking custodial, maintenance, and groundskeeping costs separately.
4. District personnel should provide an annual report to the district superintendent regarding the status of the district's operations using the measures included in this review.