AN ACT TO CREATE THE 2021 MISSISSIPPI EDUCATION TASK FORCE TO REVIEW AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON EXISTING SCHOOL REGULATIONS AND THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM IN ORDER TO REMOVE EXCESSIVE REGULATIONS AND PROVIDE GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN EVALUATING PUBLIC SCHOOLS; TO PRESCRIBE THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE; TO DESCRIBE SPECIFIC TOPICS TO BE STUDIED BY THE TASK FORCE; TO REQUIRE THE TASK FORCE TO MAKE A REPORT OF ITS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEGISLATURE BY DECEMBER 1, 2021; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) There is created the 2021 Mississippi Education Task Force to review and make recommendations on public school regulations and certain education programs with the intent of:

(a) Removing excessive and unnecessary regulations;

(b) Improving avenues to innovation; and

(c) Assessing the accuracy and effectiveness of the state's accountability system to ensure all students receive a quality education that meets their needs and prepares them for life and success and to determine the reliability of the system in evaluating Mississippi's public schools.
(2) The task force shall be composed of the following members:

(a) The State Superintendent of Public Education or the superintendent's designee;

(b) The Director of the Office of Educational Accountability;

(c) Employees of the State Department of Education having specific knowledge and expertise in those areas to be studied by the task force, designated by the state superintendent;

(d) The State Auditor or the Auditor's designee;

(e) A local school superintendent designated by the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents;

(f) A local school business administrator designated by the Mississippi Association of School Business Officials;

(g) A member of the State Board of Education appointed by the chair of the board;

(h) A school principal employed by a suburban school district and a school principal employed by a rural school district, as designated by the Mississippi Association of School Administrators; and

(i) No less than three (3) teachers who have been recognized as a Teacher of the Year in their respective school districts, selected by the State Department of Education.

(3) The task force shall study and make recommendations on the following:
(a) Policies, rules, regulations and procedures established by the State Board of Education or the State Department of Education which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were suspended or waived: the task force shall review the effect of the suspension or waiver of such policies, rules, regulations and procedures in order to determine whether the suspension or waiver should be implemented permanently.

(b) Policies, rules, regulations and procedures established by the State Board of Education or the State Department of Education which are suspended or waived for certain school districts that have attained an accountability rating of "A" or "B": the task force shall review the effect a suspension or waiver of such policies, rules, regulations and procedures has in those school districts in order to determine whether the suspension or waiver should be granted to all school districts.

(c) The districts of innovation program: the task force shall review the effectiveness of the program to determine if it is fulfilling its mission of enabling school districts to improve the educational performance of students and shall recommend whether changes to the program would remove barriers to participation. The review of the districts of innovation program must include:

(i) A determination of the waivers most often requested by school districts;
(ii) An analysis of how school districts are utilizing waivers under the program and best practices implemented by those districts; and

(iii) A determination as to whether districts of innovation should receive a unique accountability rating when using different assessments and whether the state should pursue federal waivers to attain necessary flexibility.

(d) The state school and school district accountability system: the task force shall study options available to states under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) regarding academic and nonacademic indicators and how such indicators may be calculated and weighted. The task force shall review whether changes to the state accountability system incorporating the use of indicators permissible under ESSA would provide a more transparent, accurate and effective rating system, including a determination as to whether the adoption of nonacademic indicators, such as student, teacher and parent satisfaction, would be beneficial to the state.

(e) ESSA flexibility: the task force should study opportunities available under ESSA for flexibility in testing and make recommendations on:

(i) Whether the state should apply to participate in the Innovative Assessment Development Authority to pilot locally developed innovative assessments in certain school districts, for possible future expansion statewide;
(ii) Whether the state should allow school districts to replace high school subject area tests with local chosen, nationally-recognized assessments; and

(iii) Whether the state should allow school districts to administer interim assessments throughout the year which would be combined into a final summative score.

(4) No later than thirty (30) days after the effective date of this act, the state superintendent shall convene the members of the task force for an organizational meeting at which the members shall select a chair and a vice chair from its membership. The vice chair also will serve as secretary and be responsible for keeping all records of the task force. A majority of the members of the task force constitutes a quorum. In the selection of its officers and the adoption of rules, resolutions and reports, an affirmative vote of a majority of the task force is required. All members must be notified in writing of all meetings, and those notices must be mailed or provided through electronic communications at least fifteen (15) days before the date on which a meeting is to be held. Meetings of the task force will be held at the State Department of Education; however, if it is not feasible for the task force to hold an in-person meeting, the task force may convene utilizing an online meeting platform that is accessible for viewing by the public.

(5) The State Department of Education shall provide, using existing resources, administrative and clerical support to the
task force. The state superintendent shall designate appropriate
staff to assist the task force in carrying out its duties.

(6) Subject to the availability of funding, members of the
task force who are not state employees may be compensated at the
per diem rate authorized by Section 25-3-69 and reimbursed in
accordance with Section 25-3-41 for mileage and actual expenses
incurred in the performance of their duties. However, task force
members may not incur per diem, travel or other expenses unless
previously authorized by vote, at a meeting of the task force,
which action must be recorded in the official minutes of the
meeting. Per diem and expense payments made pursuant to this
subsection may be paid from any funds made available to the task
force for that purpose.

(7) The task force shall make a report of its findings and
recommendations, including any recommended legislation, to the
Education Committees of the House of Representatives and Senate
before December 1, 2021, at which time the task force will be
dissolved.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after its passage.