Classroom Technology Task Force

A proposal to enhance the learning opportunities for Mississippi's school children

What?

The need for technology savvy workforce

As the world's economy moves toward technology, Mississippians must be prepared for high-skilled employment. By placing a computer in every classroom, teachers are given another tool to enhance the learning environment for our children—Mississippi's future.

Educational Opportunities

Mississippi Alliance for Gaining New Opportunities through Library Information Access, MAGNOLIA (http://www.lib.usm.edu/~magnolia/magnolia.html), provides online databases for publicly funded K-12 schools, public libraries, community college libraries, and university libraries in Mississippi. The MAGNOLIA databases have been of great benefit to the citizens of Mississippi since August 1997. In addition to searching the databases in libraries across the state, individuals can also access many of the electronic resources available through MAGNOLIA from their home or office computers.

> *"Bringing the world to our children and our children to the world…"*
>
> Governor Ronnie Musgrove on the impact and future of placing an Internet-accessible computer in every classroom

Mississippi's universities and community colleges are developing online courses for student around the world to participate. A sampling of courses offered by the University of Southern Mississippi can be accessed through this web site:

- http://dl.cice.usm.edu:/master/pending.html#Spring, 2001

The State Department of Education has already developed information and web sites to enhance the core curriculum offered in K-12 classrooms. Much of this can be accessed through the Mississippi Student Research Page (http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ms.htm).

The educational opportunities of the Internet are not limited to our state department of education. Our students will be able to learn and obtain information about current events, e-commerce, science projects, college course offerings, and so much more. The educational opportunities are limited only by the student's imagination. For example, NASA has developed websites to showcase some of the technology and resources available for the Classrooms of the Future (http://cotf.edu/).

Through the International Exchange Commission, Mississippi will host "The Majesty of Spain" exhibit. The exhibit will feature not only teacher packets to enhance field trips to the exhibit but also interactive web site to supplement learning activities in the classroom (http://www.majestyofspain.com/sgroups/sgroup1.htm).

Vision and Direction

Acknowledging the need for enhancing our children's learning environment, Governor Musgrove set the goal to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public classroom in Mississippi by the end of 2002 in his first State of the State address.

Who?

The research and activities

The Task Force is a group of professionals including educators, business leaders, and representatives from non-profit foundations and technology companies. The task force embarked on a goal of placing a computer in every classroom only after setting out requirements that the State Department of Education (1) require teacher training as a condition to receiving a computer, and (2) continue to develop online materials for teachers to access for their classes.

In May 2000, the State Department of Education surveyed local schools to determine the number of classrooms with computers and Internet connections. Of the 30,033 public classrooms in Mississippi, 17,431 classrooms were wired with an Internet-accessible computer. As shown in the table below of the remaining 12,602 classrooms without an Internet-accessible computer, 5,731 classrooms were wired for Internet access.

Table 1: Mississippi Classrooms Requiring an Internet-accessible Computer, May 2000

Classrooms with an Internet Connection	5,731
Classrooms **without** an Internet Connection	6,871
Total Number of Classrooms without an Internet-accessible Computer	12,602

Source: State Department of Education technology survey, May 2000.

Under the direction of the Task Force, state agencies issued a request for proposals identifying the minimum standards required for Internet-accessible computers under this initiative in June 2000 for 6,000 computers. The Task Force chose to offer six contracts for 1,000 computers to vendors from across the Mississippi and the U.S. (Howard Industries, Inc.; Business Communications, Inc.; Government Computers Sales, Inc.; Bull Computers, Inc.; Dell Computers, Inc.; and Compaq Computer Corp.).

The proposed computers were offered at substantial discounts. Some were as much as 50% below retail with the average cost of each computer at $1,000. Additionally, vendors were asked to provide free products to the state or local school. These include web sites, educational software, and teacher training.

As contract negotiations continued, Governor Musgrove and Dr. Thompson agreed to add 325 Macintosh computers to first year's efforts (one-half of total Macintosh computers needed). On February 15, 2001, the Classroom Technology Task Force and the Governor announced the execution contracts for the placement of the first year's computers.

How and When?

Financing and Fundraising

The State of Mississippi has appropriated $2 million for the first year's efforts. The Governor held a fundraiser in McLean, Virginia with technology companies, including America Online, garnering commitments totaling more than $2 million.

Governor Musgrove and Carolyn Shanks, CEO and President of Entergy Mississippi, are kicking off a 60-day fundraising campaign to collect the remaining funds needed.

The fundraising campaign will be conducted through a grassroots effort involving Mississippi bankers, utility customer service representatives and Chambers of Commerce, coordinated by the Public Education Forum of Mississippi, a 501(c)3 non-profit foundation.

The Public Education Forum will invest over $60,000 in staffing resources and $50,000 in support materials and communication to carry out the program, so that every dollar raised will be used for computer purchases.

Coordinating the fund-raising effort will be Johnny Franklin and Peggy Howard of the Public Education Forum working in cooperation with the finance committee.

This effort will require a 75+ day campaign, kicking off officially on or about March 1 and continuing through May 15, with clean up until June 30 to collect the funds.

For campaign purposes, the state will be divided according to the five Congressional Districts and into five campaign teams involving local bankers, utility representatives and Chambers of Commerce.

Why?

Improving our Mississippi's Future

Opening our children to the world and the assets of the World Wide Web is an integral part of Mississippi's economic future. Our commitment to preparing our children for the high-tech, high wage jobs of the future is vitally important to the success of Mississippi and improving the quality of life. By making a commitment to the Computers in the Classroom project, you and your organization will help foster a stronger learning environment for our children and continue building a healthy economy for all Mississippians.