

Governor's Column **9/22/02**

Mississippi is setting the standard for others to follow when it comes to advancements in education.

Our "Computers in the Classroom" initiative is placing Internet-accessible computers in every public school classroom in the state, and hundreds of Mississippi students are building nearly 6,000 computers from scratch to help with this effort.

We were ahead of the federal government in establishing strict accountability measures for our schools.

Test scores in elementary and secondary schools are up.

And, we're increasing teacher pay from 49th to 19th in the nation.

This past week brought more good news about the work we're doing for education in Mississippi.

Our efforts to better prepare our children for college received help in the form of a \$12.5 million grant from the United States Department of Education.

Known as the GEAR UP (*G*aining *E*arly Awareness and *R*eadiness for *U*ndergraduate *P*rograms) grant, its mission is to ensure that disadvantaged middle and secondary school students are prepared to pursue and succeed in post-secondary education.

Approximately 8,500 students in 34 school districts across the state will benefit from this program, with activities that include comprehensive tutoring and mentoring, outreach and family involvement, summer academic enrichment and transitional programs, professional development, and tuition assistance.

Like other successful programs we have implemented in education, the GEAR UP program is a partnership. The Mississippi Department of Education, the State Board of Community and Junior Colleges, and the Institutions of Higher Learning are all focused on the common goal of preparing our young people for success in life.

Additional information on the GEAR UP program is available at www.gearupms.org.

In further recognition of our commitment to education, Mississippi has also been chosen as one of six states to participate in the first phase of the “Following the Leaders” project. Also funded by the U.S. Department of Education, this project is designed to provide the technology resources and hands-on guidance necessary to implement the mandates of the new “No Child Left Behind” legislation.

Fifteen schools will participate in this pilot program, and you can rest assured these schools are excited and ready to work.

The project was developed by the Education Leaders Council, Project Achieve, Accountability Works, the Milken Family Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

A total of 28 states originally applied for this program. In choosing Mississippi, it was said that we had “an infectious enthusiasm and commitment to students,” as well as the “immediate capacity to use ‘Following the Leaders’ tools effectively.”

Those words are strong endorsements of the work we’ve been doing.

Since my first campaign for the state Senate 15 years ago, improving the educational system for our children has been my personal passion. We are making great progress. With the GEAR UP and “Following the Leaders” programs in place, we’ll continue setting the standard.