

If you go to the tax collector's office to buy a new car tag and the computer's down, you're out of luck. If you go to the ATM to make a withdrawal and the computer's down, you don't get your money. If you're grocery shopping and the computer's down, they can't scan your items and get you on your way.

Technology is an integral part of even the most mundane tasks, and when the technology breaks down, it alters our routines and the way we do our business.

When technology breaks down, it is important to have the right minds there to fix it. Even better, we would prefer to have the right minds in place to make sure it doesn't break down in the first place.

That's part of the push behind the "Computers in the Classrooms" initiative here in Mississippi.

By the end of this month, we will be celebrating the fact that Mississippi is the first state in the nation to have an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom. This fact has already been confirmed by the National Governors Association, which stated that Mississippi is "at the head of the wave of technological innovation."

We're beyond being wired for the Internet. We're connecting our children directly to the incredible research capabilities of the world wide web and helping them develop the technological skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

More than 32,000 classrooms will have an Internet-accessible computer. Hundreds of thousands of students around the state, from kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, will have new opportunities to learn. Location or economic status will no longer be factors in the learning process.

A simple click of a mouse will put our students on equal footing, with students in Goodman having the same research capabilities as students in Gulfport.

Hundreds of Mississippi's students have also been busy developing their technological skills by actually building the computers destined for the classrooms. This fall, students from around the state have been participating in "blitz builds," one-day events resulting in dozens of new computers.

Through this effort, supported by ExplorNet and the Mississippi Development Authority, these students have built nearly 6,000 computers. During a blitz build this past week, students gathered at Jackson State University's e-Center to build more than 400 computers.

Great progress is being made in education across our state. Teacher pay is on the rise, along with our test scores. More of our students are graduating from high school and going on to college. Our accountability measures are stronger than those required by the federal government.

And, we are the national leader when it comes to bringing technology into the classroom.

That's good for Mississippi, and it's good for our children, and it's good for our future.