

Governor's Column – 11/25/01

Mississippi Teachers Setting the Standard

Here's a statistic for your consideration: 6,500 teachers from the 50 states and the District of Columbia earned their National Board Certification this year. Of those 6,500 teachers, 405 were from Mississippi – the sixth highest number of teachers in the nation. This brings the total number of national board certified teachers in Mississippi to 1,159, again the sixth highest in the country.

We have made a commitment to our teachers, a commitment to pay them as the professionals they are. In fact, Mississippi was the first state in the nation to offer more pay to teachers with national board certification. These teachers are making their own commitment to their profession, and more importantly, to the students they teach.

This certification comes through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. According to the Board, certification is “a symbol of professional teaching excellence. A National Board certificate will attest that a teacher was judged by his or her peers as one who is accomplished, makes sound professional judgments about students' best interests, and acts effectively on those judgments.”

Every student in Mississippi has God-given talents and potential, and our teachers are helping them make the most of them. I have said before that Mississippi is America's state of promise. With great teachers at the head of the class, that promise is brighter than ever.

I read once that “teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task.” We're going to help them reach attainable goals with adequate tools.

Education is a priority of mine and dramatic progress is being made. We're investing in tech-prep centers and new and renovated school buildings. We're on our way to our goal

of being the first state in the nation to place an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom, a goal we're reaching because of an innovative partnership between government and the private sector. And, we are going to begin paying our teachers the salaries they deserve.

We're investing in products, and we're investing in people.

What does this mean to Mississippi? It means the world beyond our borders is looking at what we're doing and following our lead. It means other states are calling us for information on our programs and initiatives. It means Mississippi is setting the standard for excellence.

Most importantly, it means our children will be ready to compete in a workforce different from previous generations of Mississippians. Not only will they compete, they will succeed.

The root of these successes comes back to a central theme: Teachers who are committed to their profession and to their students. Without them, our efforts are hindered and our promise is scaled back.

For the 2001-02 school year, more than 16,000 teachers have applied for the opportunity to achieve National Board Certification. Mississippi's teachers are right in there, working hard to keep up the standard of excellence they have demonstrated to us and to the nation.

I am proud of them and the dedication they have for their calling. Good teachers are like candles; they consume themselves to light the way for others. As we close our Thanksgiving holiday, Mississippi's teachers are another reason for us to be thankful.