

By Gov. Ronnie Musgrove

Technology in education is about education, not technology. But without technology, we cannot reach the ambitious goals for education laid out by the Southern Regional Education Board.

Both as governor of Mississippi and chairman of SREB, I am committed to technology:

- Every public school classroom in Mississippi is now connected to the Internet. This is a huge achievement, confirmed by the National Governors Association and written about by The New York Times in a feature about our students gathering to build computers (and learn a lot in the process). The real significance is what the connection to the Internet will mean for our children. Hundreds of thousands of students around the state will have new opportunities to learn. Location or economic status will no longer be factors in the learning process.
- At SREB, we have just published *Technology Can Extend Access to Postsecondary Education: An Action Agenda for the South*, which spells out steps that can be taken now in postsecondary education.
- The SREB Executive Committee just approved development of WAYS IN Mentor, which is particularly designed to help adults take advantage of e-learning courses. The SREB *Electronic Campus* now has more than 8,000 courses from 300 colleges and universities in the 16 SREB states.

Again, what matters is not the technology but the education it makes possible. The SBEB board, which I chair, has set 12 goals. Spelled out in *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead*, they assert that SREB states can lead the nation in educational progress. This is a tall order, especially for a region that has historically been at the bottom when statistics are figured.

But we know that the South *can* lead. My predecessor as chairman of SREB, Governor Roy Barnes of Georgia, listed numerous ways that the South already leads in education. Mississippi is ranked sixth in the number of nationally-board certified teachers. Georgia led the nation in the percentage of children in state-funded prekindergarten programs. North Carolina was first in America in mathematic gains of eighth graders between 1990 and 2000, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Texas was first nationally in the mathematics achievement of African-American fourth graders on the 2000 NAEP test.

Now the goals call on SREB states to have all children ready for first grade; to exceed national averages in achievement while closing the gaps in meeting state

standards for all groups; to have every student earn a high school diploma; to strengthen principals and teachers; to prepare students for the transitions all the way up; to assess colleges and universities; to have an accountable education *system* from prekindergarten to postgraduate and adult education.

Technology can be of enormous help. It can assure that quality advanced courses are available everywhere; that adults can pursue degrees and livelihoods at the same time; that first-rate professional development is available for every principal and teacher; that comprehensive support is at hand around the clock for every college student.

Technology isn't magic. It doesn't replace good teachers, though it can extend their reach. It doesn't replace our extensive educational infrastructure, though it can help us to take full advantage of the investments we have already made.

We have seized on technology in our everyday lives – from banking at the ATM to enjoying music on CD and MP3 discs. Our plan – in Mississippi and at SREB – is to seize on technology's potential to enhance education. You can visit any to school in Mississippi to see what we have done. You can take advantage of technology to read the extensive library of publications available at the SREB Web site (www.sreb.org).

SREB states *can* lead the nation in educational progress. Our technology initiatives – in Mississippi and at SREB – will help us do it.

Governor Ronnie Musgrove of Mississippi is chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board, America's first interstate compact for education. Headquartered in Atlanta, the SREB has 16 member states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. All the publications mentioned, and many others, are on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org.