

*Remarks for the
Mississippi Head Start Association Spring Conference
April 29, 2003*

- Recognize Arvern Moore (will be introducing you)

- Appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today
 - Even more, appreciate the work you do for our children
 - It benefits all Mississippians

- Sometimes we spend so much time worrying about what our children will become tomorrow that we forget they are already somebody today
 - Important to focus on early childhood education

- We're doing that through a unique public/private partnership
 - DHS and Barksdale Reading Institute
 - 18-month needs assessment to determine exactly what we need and ways to meet those needs

- Another important factor in success is healthy kids
 - Covering more kids than ever through CHIP
 - From 500 in 2000 to more than 56,000
 - Healthy children go to school ready to learn

- The work you do in early childhood education lays the foundation for everything else we do in education
 - Making strong progress

- Many think of us as 48th, 49th, 50th in education
 - That's no longer true
 - Education is our first priority / has been for past three years since I've been in office
 - Public schools are our cornerstones of our communities and the key to the success of our economy.

- Mississippi is a recognized leader in education
 - Teacher pay / 49th to 19th when fully implemented
 - Princeton Review: 12th best testing system in nation
 - Leading other states in preparedness for “No Child Left Behind” / USA Today article
 - 6th in the nation in National Board Certified Teachers

- One of the most exciting successes in education is in technology
 - Every public school classroom in the state has Internet-accessible computer
 - Mississippi first state in the nation to achieve this goal / confirmed by NGA

- Other states are also watching what we've done with our investment in education
 - In my State of the State address, challenged Legislature to invest in education at 62% of budget, and fund it first
 - They rose to the challenge, and I signed legislation within next 3 weeks

- Efforts in education didn't just start this year
 - Have been working on this since I took office

- We're proving to the people of Mississippi, and the rest of the nation, that we're serious about education
 - Making the investment now for dividends tomorrow

- The investment we make in early childhood education pays strong dividends
 - Sending kids to school ready to learn
 - That's the end result of the work you do and it makes a difference