

MEMO

To: First Lady Melanie Musgrove
From: Kelly Riley, Policy Liaison
Date: March 1, 2000
Subject: Velma Jackson Magnet High School
CC: Rosemary Maxey
Lisa Mader
File

I represented the Office of the Governor on a visit to Velma Jackson Magnet High School in Camden on Thursday, February 24, and found it to be a unique institution, which I wanted to bring to your attention. The resources available to this school, via a \$3 million United States Department of Education grant, have enabled it to provide a curriculum to its students like none other offered in the state. The school serves approximately 400 students in rural northern Madison County.

The school's magnet curriculum, which must also comply with State Department of Education requirements, is based upon that of the National Academy Foundation (NAF). Leading industry and education representatives develop NAF's curriculum, which addresses industry-specific knowledge and general workplace competencies. Velma Jackson's curriculum emphasizes economics, culture, and ecology, with a learning lab dedicated to each of these "centers." Coordinated classroom activities in the core curriculum (i.e., math, science, language, social studies) build upon centers. The curriculum utilizes a hands-on approach enhanced by simulation learning activities.

I have attached descriptive information, as well as pictures, of two of the centers. A brief overview of each center's lab is provided below.

Economics: The center utilizes five different learning stations: financial planning, the Stock Market, credit/loan, banking, and an international boardroom. The center has approximately 20 computers for student use. The attached curriculum outline provides an overview of student work activities at each station. To emphasize this curriculum's hands-on learning approach, the teacher is obtaining international currency for the students to use at the banking station.

Culture: The center also utilizes five different learning stations: discover (computer stations), adventure (multi-media presentations), exploration (hands-on museum), investigation (reading lounge), and excursion (travel agency). The attached curriculum outline provides an overview of student work activities at each station. Students study a different area of the world every three weeks. The hands-on museum provides students with articles of life from the studied region (kimonos, chopsticks, snake charmer basket, mask, etc.). International time clocks are ordered for the travel agency, where students are given the assignment of planning a trip abroad.

Ecology: The Ecology Center is under construction and is scheduled to conduct classes beginning in April. The center will be the only high school in Mississippi with Doppler radar. The center also includes a greenhouse, green sites around campus, aquariums containing marine life from around the world, microscopes and a climatorium for growing plant life in different environments.

The school is in the second year of the three-year grant. The school implemented this curriculum and the learning centers this past September. Administrators report that the school's absenteeism rate has dropped from 40% to 7% and that students seem more excited about learning.

Based upon my brief visit to Velma Jackson, I think the school exemplifies the quality of learning supported by the Governor's education agenda. Studies are hands-on and the school is very technologically advanced. In addition, the school is providing students of a lower-socio economic status with learning opportunities from around the world.

Velma Jackson's administration strongly desires to have you or Governor Musgrove to visit the school. I think that as a teacher you would truly appreciate the exceptional learning environment at Velma Jackson Magnet School. Frankly, I was amazed at the advancement and uniqueness of this institution in the middle of a rural area. I will be happy to provide any additional information to you or to assist you in making arrangements to visit the school.