
Classroom Technology Task Force

A proposal to enhance the learning
opportunities for Mississippi's school children

Why?

The need for technology savvy workforce

As the world's economy moves toward technology, Mississippians must be prepared for the high-skilled employment. By placing a computer in every classroom, teachers are given another tool to enhance the learning environment for our children—Mississippi's future.

Educational Opportunities

The State Department of Education has already developed information and web sites to enhance the core curriculum offered in K-12 classrooms. Much of this can be accessed through the Mississippi Student Research Page (<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ms.htm>).

The educational opportunities of the Internet are not limited to our state department of education. Our students will be able to learn obtain information about current events, e-commerce, science projects, college course offerings, and so much more. The educational opportunities are limited only by the student's imagination. For example, NASA has developed websites to showcase some of the technology and resources available for the Classrooms of the Future (<http://cotf.edu/>).

The Majesty of Spain Exhibit will feature not only teacher packets to enhance field trips to the exhibit but also interactive web site to supplement learning activities in the classroom (<http://www.majestyofspain.com/sgroups/sgroup1.htm>).

Mississippi Alliance for Gaining New Opportunities through Library Information Access, MAGNOLIA (<http://www.lib.usm.edu/~magnolia/magnolia.html>), provides online databases for publicly funded K-12 schools, public libraries, community college libraries, and university libraries in Mississippi. The MAGNOLIA databases have been of great benefit to the citizens of Mississippi since August 1997. In addition to searching the databases in libraries across the state, individuals can also access many of the electronic resources available through MAGNOLIA from their home or office computers.

Mississippi's universities and community colleges are developing online courses for student around the world to participate. A sampling of courses offered by the University of Southern Mississippi can be accessed through this web site:

- <http://dl.cice.usm.edu/master/pending.html#Spring, 2001>

Vision and Direction

Acknowledging the need for enhancing our children's learning environment, Governor Musgrove set forth in his inaugural State of the State address the challenge to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public classroom in Mississippi by the end of 2002. Dr. Richard Thompson, State Superintendent, joined the Governor and the both chair the Classroom Technology Task Force.

Who?

The research and activities

The Task Force is a group of professionals from education (including teachers), business, non-profit foundations, technology companies. The task force embarked on goal of placing a computer in every classroom only after setting out requirements that the State Department of Education (1) require teacher training as a condition to receiving a computer and (2) continue to develop a online materials for teachers to access for their classes.

In May 2000, the State Department of Education surveyed local schools to determine the number of classrooms with computers and Internet connections. Off the 30,033 public classrooms in Mississippi, 17,431 classrooms were wired with an Internet-accessible computer. As shown in the table below of the remaining 12,602 classrooms without an Internet-accessible computer, 5,731 classrooms were wired for Internet access.

Table 1: Mississippi Classrooms Requiring an Internet-accessible Computer, May 2000

Classrooms with an Internet Connection	5,731
Classrooms without an Internet Connection	6,871
Total Number of Classrooms without an Internet-accessible Computer	12,602

Source: State Department of Education technology survey, May 2000.

Under the direction of the Task Force, state agencies issued a request for proposals identifying the minimum standards required for Internet-accessible computers under this initiative in June 2000 for 6,000 computers. The Task Force chose to offer six contracts for 1,000 computers to vendors from across the Mississippi and the U.S. (Howard Computers; Business Communications, Inc.; Government Computers Sales, Inc.; Bull/Gateway Computers; Dell Computers, Inc.; and Compaq Computer Corp.).

The computers proposed were offered at substantial discounts some were as much as 50% below retail. Additionally, vendors were asked to provide value-adds at no cost to the state or local school. These include web sites, educational software, and teacher training.

As contract negotiations continued, the Governor and Dr. Thompson agreed to add 325 Macintosh computers to first year's efforts (one-half of total Macintosh computers needed). On February 15, 2001, the Governor and the Classroom Technology Task Force announced the execution contracts for the placement of the first year's computers.

How?

Financing and Fundraising

The State of Mississippi has appropriated \$2 million for the first year's efforts. The Governor held a fundraiser in McLean, Virginia with technology companies, including

America Online, raising commitments of more than \$2 million. With the average cost of each computer is \$1,000.

Governor Musgrove and Carolyn Shanks, CEO and President of Entergy Mississippi, are kicking off a 60-day fundraising campaign to collect the remaining funds needed.