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OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** FILE  
**FROM:** KELLY RILEY  
**SUBJECT:** STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION PRIORITIES  
**DATE:** 12/14/2000  
**CC:** FILE

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The Mississippi Department of Education has adopted seven key priorities, discussed below:

1. **READING:** MDE adopted the Mississippi Reading Initiative with the goal that children in grades 1-3 demonstrate a growing reading proficiency that enables them to leave the third grade as proficient readers. MDE has established reading workgroups, comprised of leading teachers, to review guidelines and curriculums. MDE is emphasizing the role of after-school and summer reading programs, as well as reduced class sizes and expanded training for teachers.
2. **EARLY LITERACY:** Research supports that quality early childhood experiences can have positive results on long-term student achievement, particularly in literacy. MDE is working to provide parents with information (*Every Child a Reader: Getting Ready for Kindergarten* booklet) they need to prepare their children for school. MDE is also working to increase the availability of pre-K programs and is partnering with Head Start agencies and other early childhood education providers to maximize resources.
3. **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:** MDE's new accreditation system shifts emphasis from the district to the school level. Each school will be assigned a "student growth goal," with each school then being expected to contribute a year's worth of academic growth for each year of academic instruction. Students will be tested for accreditation purposes in grades 3-8. The plan also calls for passage of mandatory end-of-course tests for all students in Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History from 1877, and English II prior to a student's receiving a high school diploma. The Legislature passed the new accountability plan during the 2000 regular session that will ensure that local school boards, administrators and teachers are held accountable for student achievement.
4. **TEACHERS/TEACHING:** MDE is intensifying its teacher recruitment efforts, working to raise teacher salaries and to provide teachers with relevant professional development. The 1998 Mississippi Critical Teacher Shortage Act established the

Critical Needs Scholarship Program and the Mississippi Fellowship Program (provides full scholarship to teachers willing to relocate to a shortage area while pursuing a graduate degree). MDE hired 3 recruiters to promote the teaching profession and Mississippi's public education. The Mississippi Teacher Center also offers the annual Teacher Renewal Institute the Teacher Job Fair.

5. **LEADERSHIP/PRINCIPALS:** MDE is committed to working to see that principals receive the training and preparation they need to be sound instructional leaders. Through the Mississippi School Administrator Sabbatical Program, eligible teachers interested in becoming school administrators can continue receiving their full salary while they are enrolled full-time in an educational leadership program that leads to a school administrator license. MDE developed four new training modules for administrators during the 1999 school year.
  6. **SAFE, ORDERLY SCHOOLS:** MDE wants to strengthen safety within Mississippi schools and created the Office of Safe and Orderly Schools to handle issues related to school buildings and transportation. The Office provides school safety training sessions to administrators, reviews school safety plans and conducts school safety audits. MDE has established rapid-response teams made up of regional school safety experts to assist districts in crisis prevention and management. MDE also operates *Connections*, a toll-free, statewide safety hotline.
  7. **TECHNOLOGY:** MDE is using technology to advance the department's other six priorities. MDE is committed to providing students, teachers and administrators with access to both up-to-date technology and the training needed to make the most of technology. Schools with distance learning sites can take classes offered at other sites. Technology Literacy Grants fund programs that use technology to teach reading and language arts. The Teach NET program provides teachers with extensive technological training. MDE has developed *Plug into RAISE*, a new training module designed to help educators and administrators integrate technology into the reading curriculum and which supplements the objectives of the Mississippi Reading Initiative. The State Superintendent is co-chairing the Governor's Task Force for Classroom Technology.
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