
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: GOVERNOR
FROM: RILEY
SUBJECT: PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM & MISSISSIPPI'S SCHOOL-TO-CAREER PARTNERSHIP: 2001 CONFERENCE FOR DISCUSSION OF STATE ACTION FOR EDUCATED WORKFORCE FOR THE NEW ECONOMY
DATE 8/11/00
CC: BOYD
SIMMONS
FILE

Johnny Franklin of the Public Education Forum met with me on July 24 to discuss the Forum's concept for a conference/forum to create a dialogue between government, business and educational leaders in order to eliminate the "disconnect" between business and educational entities in our state in ensuring Mississippi's educated workforce. In conversations with educational and business leaders, the Forum has recognized such a "disconnect" and the need for an avenue of dialogue. Significant numbers of students are dropping out of high school, community college or four-year universities with little focus or attention by state leaders in preparing these students to enter the workforce with the needed skills. The Forum has also identified the perception in our state that vocational or "blue collar" careers are not professional. Such positions are critical to a successful and complete workforce and economic environment in our state. This proposed conference would bring all parties to the table with the anticipated outcome of a united and coordinated effort.

As a fellow State Partner in Mississippi's School-to-Careers Initiative, Franklin presented these concepts and the Forum's idea for a conference/forum for the discussion of these areas between government, education and business leaders at the State Partners' meeting on August 1. The strategy of Mississippi's School-to-Careers initiative is to form partnerships at the local level – seamless connections among business and industry, communities, schools, and higher education - that will enable Mississippi's citizens to become life-long learners and meet the oncoming challenges of the New Economy. Mississippi's School-to-Careers Initiative is implemented through 50 local partners throughout the state. The State Partners asked Franklin and I to discuss the concept of a conference further and to request your support of the concept so as to lend credibility to the initiative.

Federal Workforce Investment Act funds, via Mississippi's School-to-Careers Initiative, are available for such a conference. We anticipate this one-day conference

being held in the late spring/early summer of 2001 here in Jackson. School district superintendents, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges administrators, IHL administrators, private industry leaders, and governmental leaders would be invited to attend. We could possibly bring in a nationally recognized key-note speaker to initiate the discussions, with break out sessions following. Franklin has heard Willard Daggett speak on this same concept and has suggested him as a speaker/facilitator. We might also look into Richard Florida, Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management. Florida has spoken at several NGA functions concerning the New Economy and the workforce.

In addition to your support for this forum, the Forum and School-to-Careers feel like the following parties should be contacted for their input and support for such a conference:

Government: J.C. Burns, Executive Director, DECD
Dr. Bettye Fletcher, DHS
Representative Joe Warren, House Education Committee
Senator Alice Harden, Senate Education Committee

Education: Commissioner Thomas Layzell, IHL
Dr. Olon Ray, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Richard Thompson, MDE (*has expressed support*)
Dr. David Shephard, Executive Director of the Mississippi
Association of School Superintendents (*has expressed support*)

Business: Blake Wilson, MEC
George Walker, State Workforce Development Council
Mississippi Public Education Forum Board members
Mississippi Manufacturers' Association
Mississippi Restaurant Association

We anticipate discussions at this proposed forum focusing on:

- How do we define an educated workforce in Mississippi? *We should review business's needs in today's market v. those skills and training provided by our educational system.*
- What steps do we need to take to ensure such a workforce?
- Are students who are completing the formal educational procedures for entrance into the workforce actually prepared for today's workforce? *Is Mississippi's curriculum at all educational levels providing students with the skills and attributes needed in today's workforce?*
- Are we effectively bringing drop-outs into the training loop (i.e., if kids are not completing the formal educational procedures for entrance into the

workforce, how are we ensuring that they are directed to Mississippi's workforce? *What are we doing as a state to ensure that those students who choose not to complete their formal education, whether K-12 or higher, are attracted to the workforce and are valued as professionals with a contribution to Mississippi's workforce?*

The Forum and School-to-Careers would like to pursue this idea with your support, as it could encourage other parties to participate. Franklin (353-5480) would be happy to discuss this idea with you further if you would like. Please advise as to action you would like me to take.