

Education is Mississippi's priority. Mississippi realizes that good schools build good jobs, which build good communities. Thus, the quality of education influences economic development and the quality of life in Mississippi. Mississippi has demonstrated its commitment to education via recent investments:

- Answering a challenge presented by Governor Ronnie Musgrove, the Mississippi Legislature fully funded education, kindergarten through university level, for FY 2004 during the first month of the 2003 legislative session, funded education before other agencies' budgets, and funded education at 62% of the state budget.
- The National Governors Association has confirmed that Mississippi is the first state in the nation to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom in the state. According to the NGA, Mississippi is "at the head of the wave of technological innovations."
- Mississippi is currently in the third year of a five-year teacher pay raise plan that, when fully implemented, will raise the average teacher salary for Mississippi from 49th to 19th in the nation. The day after Governor Musgrove signed the legislation, the *New York Times* commented in an editorial that Mississippi had put together the kind of package that continued to elude New York.
- The Teacher Quality Task Force, working in collaboration with the Public Education Forum and the Mississippi Economic Council in 2001-2002, developed a set of recommendations to make a meaningful contribution to the goal of having a qualified, competent and caring teacher in every classroom in Mississippi.
- The Mississippi Student Achievement Act of 1999 and Senate Bill 2488, passed during the 2000 legislative session, work together to establish Mississippi's new accountability standards which will reward schools based on student performance and provide for an intensive assistance program for schools not meeting accreditation standards. New accreditation levels will now reflect student performance at the school level rather than the district level. Now, all schools will have a chance to demonstrate their success. Each school will be evaluated and assigned an accreditation level based on two criteria: 1) meeting an annual growth expectation in student achievement and 2) the percent of students proficient at grade level.
- Mississippi was the sixth state in the nation to receive approval of its accountability plan in compliance with the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Mississippi was the first state in the Southeast to receive approval.
- The Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) was established January 2000 with a \$100-million endowment from former Netscape CEO Jim Barksdale and his wife, Sally. The Barksdale Reading Institute is designed to dramatically improve the

skills of Prek-3 children through a systematic and direct implementation of a continuous improvement, research-based Mississippi Reading Reform Model.

Objectives of the Center for State Scholars compliment these and other initiatives. The Center's rigorous standards provide a map for students to advance their high school achievement and enhance their skills for the workplace or for furthering their education. Mississippi's education and business communities, working together through the Public Education Forum, can create incentives for students to participate and can recognize students for successful completion of the curriculum.

The Canton and Hattiesburg school districts would benefit from serving as the Mississippi Center's two local Scholar initiatives. Canton, located in central Mississippi, is home to the Mississippi's new Nissan plant. Mississippi's GEAR UP partnership has chosen the Canton Public Schools as a GEAR UP partner. GEAR UP, a partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education, the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges and the Institutions of Higher Learning, is designed to assist Mississippians' access to higher education. GEAR UP ensures that disadvantaged middle school and secondary school students in Mississippi are prepared to pursue and succeed in post-secondary education.

Hattiesburg, located in the south central portion of the state, is home to the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. James Davis, superintendent of the Hattiesburg Public Schools, has already expressed interest in the Scholars initiative. Hattiesburg Schools strives to produce students who are "creative and analytical thinkers, self-directed lifelong learners, and effective communicators who are productive citizens of a dynamic, global community."

Insert language for Criteria 2: A viable state business-education coalition exists to house and lead the Scholars effort (Peggy to work on)

Insert language for Criteria 3: Key in-state corporations serves as "flagship" sponsors through financial aid and in-kind contributions (Peggy to work on)

Today's students must be prepared to enter an increasingly competitive world. For this reason, Mississippi is strengthening 1) student assessment, 2) school accreditation and 3) accountability standards in an effort to raise student achievement. Both the State Board of Education and local school districts establish high school graduation requirements. Currently, the state requires a student to acquire twenty Carnegie Units in order to graduate. Effective with the 2002/03 school year, entering ninth graders must pass subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II (with a writing component), Biology I, and Algebra I in order to graduate.

Mississippi's Institutions of Higher Learning's college prep curriculum almost mirrors that of the Scholars initiative. The attached table compares the State Board of

Education's graduation requirements, IHL's college prep curriculum and that of the Scholars initiative.

Mississippi's student data is collected via MSIS, the Mississippi Student Information System. Annual student course completion, standardized assessment performance and graduation data is collected for each student and can be disaggregated by race, gender and socioeconomic status. An annual contract with ACT provides results at all levels by race and gender. Mississippi does not collect any SAT data. MSIS does not collect college placement or performance data.

Mississippi's Institutions of Higher Learning primarily award merit-based financial aid to students with high GPA's, as well as high ACT scores. A more rigorous curriculum should have a positive impact on ACT scores. In addition, a component of GEAR UP Mississippi involves scholarship opportunities as incentive for students who pursue a higher caliber of rigorous coursework during their secondary educations. Mississippi's Scholar's initiative would work with GEAR UP Mississippi, our state financial aid office, community colleges and universities to attain scholarships and other forms of financial assistance for Scholars.

Mississippi's State Scholars initiative would encourage students to take those courses required in the Center for State Scholars' curriculum. Mississippi's initiative would work with staff, as well as educational and business leaders, to promote the Center's curriculum. Students successfully completing the curriculum will be recognized for their achievement, at both the local and state levels via awards ceremonies, press releases, and financial aid when preparing to continue their education.