

1. Who is the Steering Committee for the Mississippi Leadership Summit on Higher Education? And what is their function?

- The 40-member steering committee is co-chaired by Governor Musgrove and Aubrey Patterson and includes a broad section of Mississippi education, business and community leaders.
- Granting every citizen access to opportunity - education, economic, and social – is the hallmark of the steering committee’s vision for Mississippi’s future. Since May, we have worked diligently in examining Mississippi’s education needs, her strengths and weaknesses, and how we can ensure all Mississippians have an opportunity to improve their lives through education.
- Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education, the report submitted by this committee includes a public agenda for higher education including priorities and initiatives that are built around that goal.
- **Several of these priorities are central to higher education -- strengthening postsecondary participation and graduation rates, ensuring life-long learning, preparing teachers, and conducting university research and partnerships with business to build a robust economy. The Steering Committee also sees higher education’s public agenda comprising responsibilities in working with other levels of education -- to improve early childhood education, raise educational aspirations of middle and secondary school students, and improve K-12 education and the quality of teaching in our schools.**

2. What do the governor and committee expect to achieve through this summit?

- We are here today to unveil Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education, a report of priorities for advancing Mississippi through its colleges and universities.
- This summit is an opportunity for us to share our **findings** and discuss the report’s six major priorities for education, their strengths, outcomes and the challenges that must be met in order to **achieve them** with fellow educators, business, legislative and other leaders.
- We are seeking the support of our fellow Mississippians, **as the priorities and their initiatives are advanced over the next several years.**

3. How does **higher** education relate to economic development?

- Improving educational attainment by all Mississippians would improve the economic situation for the entire state – as well as the social capital and civic capacity of individuals and communities. **One estimate suggests, for**

example, that equalizing educational and economic opportunities for black Mississippians would raise the state's personal income by an estimated \$3.8 billion, and the state would realize more than \$1 billion in additional tax revenues – without a tax increase.

- Living in a time of serious national uncertainty and economic challenge it is imperative that we move forward in the task of improving the educational attainment of all Mississippians. **Better education will ensure** a more skilled workforce, which will help us retain current industries and attract new ones, creating more jobs, better economy and a higher quality of life for all Mississippians. **In addition, enhanced research capacity and research focused on the economic needs of the state and the private sector will attract and retain new high tech industries and reenergize our traditional ones.**

4. Who is the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) and its Center for Public Higher Education and Trusteeship and Governance? And what is their interest in Mississippi?

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges is a Washington-DC based organization of both public and private college and university boards of trustees and regents. Its Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance has served as a coordinating and advising body helping Mississippi to bring government, business, and education leaders together to provide a cooperative framework for education, economic and social progress. They are doing so with support from major philanthropic foundations that support the Center, as well as the in-kind contributions of time and effort of the steering committee members. Mississippi was the first state chosen for the Center's higher education summit initiative because the Center saw it as a state on the move, committed to strengthening the relationship of its colleges and universities to the quality of life of its citizens.

5. Who will benefit from increased educational opportunities?

- The steering committee agrees that the people of Mississippi are our greatest asset and that all too often our schools and colleges fail to meet the needs of all Mississippians. The goal and priorities set in this report call for increasing educational opportunities for all Mississippians.
- The committee recognizes that all Mississippians are not the same and conditions vary across each region. Each initiative proposed in this report will require careful tailoring to the very specific needs of **Mississippi's regions and populations.**

6. How does this body propose to improve education, economic development, and the quality of life for Mississippians?

- **We all know Mississippi's standings in various national rankings on education, economic, and social indicators. The steering committee did not dwell on these rankings. [Vicki – suggest using the third paragraph from Musgrove/Patterson letter “Dear fellow Mississippians” with the seven bullets here]**
- **The steering committee also recognizes that statewide educational improvement will require a united front. Many priorities will require partnerships and cooperation between our colleges and universities and K-12 education, business and industry, or state government, and in some cases with the media, parents, and prominent Mississippi citizens. Other priorities will require our colleges and universities to do new things or to do some current things differently.**
- **The steering committee also recognizes that for lasting educational change to occur, greater coordination among education's sectors will be required. Therefore, the report calls for the establishment of an Education Coordinating Entity to better align policies and practices across the Pre-School to Post-College (P-16) sectors. And indeed, representatives from K-12 and higher education have been meeting over the past several months as such an entity.**

7. Haven't similar agendas been proposed in the past?

- **You will see several issues and similar themes in many parts of our report, as we have built on the work of several past and recent reports on improving education and on improving the state economy. These reports and studies are referenced in the report and the appendix, as is the Education Reform Act of 1982, the legislation that began Mississippi's long road to improved educational performance. Many of our steering committee members served on the committees and task forces that directed these earlier reports.**
- **But this report through its six priorities does address many issues and challenges that have not been addressed in past reports. We are attempting to make a strong and necessary connection between higher education and economic, social, and educational opportunity.**
- **For the first time we will present a report that includes a framework for sustained statewide policy oversight in order to gauge progress, not only on the public agenda for higher education presented in this report, but in all areas of education. The report calls for accountability through the**

creation of a Mississippi Education Progress Board, which will annually assess efforts in Mississippi educational improvement.

8. What makes this steering committee believe that these goals are attainable?

- Educational leaders have already begun to meet (**as a coordinating entity**) in order to devise strategies that will lead to greater cooperation and collaboration among the state's education sectors. **This is one example of Mississippians working together for positive change. We are confident that the report's priorities will also, in time, lead to similar positive action, and where necessary, collaborative partnerships.**
- Collaboration and coordination can boost efficiency, sharpen missions, create incentives for change and ensure effective governance and lead to a better alignment of policies and practices to enable students to move through the educational system with greater ease.

9. What incentives do private corporations or entities have in supporting this **report**?

When private corporations or anyone else supports this **report and its public agenda** they are contributing to a more superior workforce, economic development opportunities and a higher quality of life for their organization, their employees and their communities.

10. How do you intend to motivate the citizens of Mississippi, the teachers, the educational institutions and the private sector?

The report calls for coordination among leaders of education, media, government, community, and civic organizations to implement a long-term public awareness campaign in order to promote the importance of high school completion, advanced education and lifelong learning among Mississippi's population—children, families, educators, business people, the media and communities.

11. How long will it take to implement these **priorities and their** initiatives?

The committee intends for this vision and "**public agenda**" for higher education to **commence immediately but to** extend over the long term—a period possibly beyond 10 years. **Therefore, it is intended to transcend individuals and politics. Although the public agenda and the priorities and initiatives that collectively comprise it are intended to lead to strategic responses to state needs, it may alter over time as state needs change.**

12. What is the legislature's role in these initiatives? Can this initiative be successful if it is not fully supported?

This initiative requires a united front from all Mississippians. It will demand strong leadership, new partnerships and new ways of doing business. It requires us all to join in this partnership for an improved Mississippi through higher education.

Eventually and in some areas it will require additional dollars to fully implement the suggested initiatives. In our current economic condition and state budget situation, it is not possible to do so.

13. Does this report address race issues as they relate to education?

The steering committee addressed many issues the state must face; racial harmony is definitely one of those. As stated in “A shared vision for the future” in the early pages of the report, it is hoped that “Mississippi will lead the nation in fostering harmony among diverse racial and ethnic groups.” There is a need for better understanding among groups and races; education can continue to help us reach that understanding.

14. How will you judge the success and failure of this initiative?

Consider dropping, covered in numbers 7 and 11.

The primary purpose of the Mississippi Education Progress Board that is proposed in the steering committee’s report will be to assess the efforts of Mississippi in educational improvements. This board will help hold others accountable for progress.

Citizen involvement will also be crucial to any success the Educational Progress Board will have. Public hearings, and public accountability will play a large role in the success and failure of these initiatives.

15. Why is this so important?

- Our people are our greatest asset and they deserve the best. However, our state remains below national and southern state averages for adult degree attainment at every level—high school, associate, baccalaureate and graduates. These educational deficits help explain why Mississippi ranks last among the states in pre-capita income.
- In order to improve Mississippi quality of life and opportunity for all our citizens **and to ensure that education is at the center of the state’s strategic economic development**, we must improve our educational standards and unlock the door to a better life for all.

16. Who are you targeting with this **report**?

All Mississippians, **because they all benefit from our colleges and universities in ways recognized and unrecognized.**

17. Are all six priorities of equal importance?

All are important and achievable. But again, they will require higher education's leadership, entrepreneurship, and outreach and collaboration with other levels of education, state government and the business community.

When we focus on our citizens first, we empower them with more competitive and improved skills for their future. **Therefore, the first and second priorities are critically important -- raising the educational aspirations of our citizens and preparing our children to learn by the time they begin school -- and will require outreach and collaboration by colleges and universities.** When our citizens are motivated and prepared, Mississippi will grow and prosper as America's State of Promise and Opportunity.

18. What assets are in place to help achieve these **priorities and** initiatives?

Mississippi has many assets that will assist these initiatives.

- Leaders who recognize where problems exist and who genuinely care about the prosperity of the state
- An ever-increasing awareness among the business community of the value of education, not only for employees but for the state as a whole
- The state's infrastructure, including the programs and research capacity of our colleges and universities
- Technology is enhancing business opportunities—and life in general
- We have an eager and willing workforce that can rise to the demands of the new economy
- The state has made important strides in standards-based education reform on which new initiatives can build
- The state's climate, history and culture, natural resources, and its location in the mid-South and on the Gulf Coast.

19. What barriers might prohibit improved education for all Mississippians?

- Unfortunately there are a few barriers we must overcome. There is a need for better understanding among groups and races; there are often feelings in the state of inferiority, fueled in some instances by a lack of adequate and consistent resources; and education all too often operates in separate silos, each with its own entrenched bureaucracy, and is too often unable to address the state's challenges in a timely or adequate way.
- **The success or failure of the report cannot be judged in the short term. We are not saying the report's priorities will be easy to achieve in the**

long-term, but with partnerships, collaboration, cooperation between higher education and all parties -- K-12, early childhood education providers, the business community, state government, private foundations, the media, and civic leaders – this public agenda for higher education is achievable.

20. How will this agenda be funded?

The steering committee's priorities do not require a significant outlay of new funds. **Admittedly, over the course of the next decade new dollars will be necessary to achieve some of these priorities and continue improvements in education, generally.** The report calls for us to be more efficient and effective in the execution of existing programs.

It calls for us to eliminate duplications of administrative services and academic programs. Mission and program review, currently underway through IHL is a necessary action step to reduce duplication.

There must be a removal of unnecessary regulation imposed by systems offices and state bureaucracies so that colleges and universities are freed up to achieve their assigned tasks. Mississippi's system executives need to determine where they could do a better job at less cost with fewer regulations.

And finally, educational system leaders must begin setting clear expectations from results. Working together, the policy oversight and coordinating bodies recommended here can assist the lead boards and agencies to clarify expectations and benchmarks for progress, helping to ensure that Mississippi meets its goals for higher education.