

Dear Fellow Mississippians:

It is with great pride that we present to you this report, *Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education*. It is the product of much thought, discussion, research and debate among the 45-member steering committee and many other business and educational leaders from across our state. We hope that you will read it carefully and work with us to make its recommendations a reality.

We realize that we live in a time of serious national uncertainty and economic challenge. This time of ambiguity and change makes it all the more imperative that we move forward in the task of improving the educational attainment of all Mississippians. It is within our control to build a workforce in Mississippi that will help us retain current industries and attract new ones.

We Mississippians have much to be proud of in our education system and in our colleges and universities in particular. Yet we have much work to do. As the steering committee has declared we must:

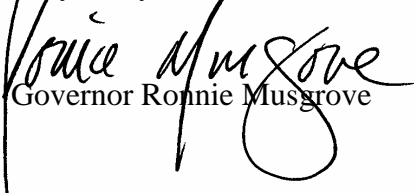
- raise the educational aspirations of our citizens
- get all of our children ready to learn by the time they begin school
- boost the quality of teaching and learning in our elementary and secondary schools
- increase college and university graduation rates
- dramatically expand adult life-long learning, worker training, and professional development,
- increase the level of activity in university research and development, and
- create a framework to sustain these commitments and strengthen accountability for the public agenda.

In light of the current decline in state revenues, we must be realistic in implementing the priorities and initiatives in this report. We will expect our education system and particularly our colleges and universities to be more efficient than ever as they focus resources to achieve the priorities and initiatives contained in this agenda.

Please reflect with us for a moment on what would happen if we actually achieved our goal. 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 from Pascagoula to Clarksdale.

Only competent and vigorous leaders willing to join forces with a wide cross-section of organizational partners can deliver the highest quality education that Mississippians deserve. Please join with us in the good work of enabling all Mississippians to enjoy greater opportunity through higher education.

Very Truly Yours,


Governor Ronnie Musgrove

Aubrey Patterson