

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. Our universities offer world-renowned programs, we receive an impressive amount of federal research dollars, and many of our young people enroll in our private institutions and two-year colleges. Yet we have much work to do in higher education and in all levels of education. 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. Mission and program review, for example, currently underway in the IHL are necessary action steps to reduce duplication and unnecessary cost. I call upon leaders in all walks of life in our state to work with us in determining what we can afford to do now, and what we will plan to do as our finances improve. Certainly the coordination and accountability changes called for in the final section are things we can and should move on quickly.

Please reflect with me 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.

To provide just one illustration, opening the doors to greater educational attainment among Mississippi's African-American population would help the bottom line not only for individual families but also for the state as a whole. Suppose, for instance, that African Americans in the state had the same levels of educational attainment and earnings as the state's white population. Equalizing educational and economic opportunities for black Mississippians would raise the state's total personal income by an estimated \$3.8 billion, and the state would realize more than \$1 billion in additional tax revenues.

Of course, if we raised the expectations and educational attainment of *all* Mississippians, the personal and statewide economic gains would be even greater.

Mississippi is fortunate in the broad array of potential partners willing to contribute to this effort. These potential contributors include the Stennis Space Center's Office of Education, whose award-winning work has helped strengthen the region's math and science education pipeline; the Public Education Forum; the Mississippi Economic Council; and the Mississippi Technology Alliance. There are many more.

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