

*Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education*, a forward-looking and goal-oriented agenda for all of our colleges and universities -- public and private, as well as two-year and four-year institutions, was released at the Leadership Summit on Higher Education on January 7, 2002. *Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education* focused on six major priorities recommending what higher education can do to advance our state. 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

The leadership summit brought together Mississippi leaders of state government, the business community, and higher education, as well as other civic leaders of our state. This report will help advance Mississippi's competitiveness and improve the quality of life of our citizens.

The following reflect some, but not all, of the initiatives undertaken in Mississippi since the release of *Building Opportunity in Mississippi* to address the six priorities.

*Priority One: Raise the educational aspirations of our citizens.*

Governor Musgrove challenged the Legislature in his 2003 State of the State address to invest in education first and to demonstrate the state's priority for education by investing in it at 62% of the state budget. The Legislature answered this challenge. This commitment sends a strong message to the citizens of Mississippi which both builds support for education and heightens the value of education.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) is providing public relations instruments to and encouraging community involvement in all schools, but especially those schools identified as Priority Schools under Mississippi's new accountability model. The Department's Occupational Diploma Program prepares students with disabilities to be productive members of the workforce.

The Institutions of Higher Learning seeks to ensure the delivery of high quality educational services that are designed to teach the value of education and training for the individual and the State. **The Office of Academic Affairs** promotes academic quality in educational development to meet the diverse academic, workforce and lifelong needs of all Mississippians through initiatives such as America Reads Mississippi, FastForward Mississippi and Gear Up Mississippi.

*Priority Two: Expand and improve pre-kindergarten programs for children in all areas of the state so that all of Mississippi's children will start school ready to learn.*

Governor Musgrove announced on October 31, 2002, a partnership between the Barksdale Reading Institute and the Department of Human Services to fund an 18-month early childhood needs assessment. This assessment will identify what is needed in order to improve childcare in our state, what such improvements would cost, and what internal and external resources exist to help pay for those improvements. Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan of Columbia University and Dr. Richard Brandon of the University of Washington, both nationally recognized early childhood experts, are conducting this assessment.

Governor Musgrove also introduced Summer Start during his 2003 State of the State Address. Summer Start would provide an extended-year, full-day kindergarten to children who have not been exposed to basic skills by allowing them to begin kindergarten two months the summer before they would ordinarily enter and to continue for two months after kindergarten, right before entering first grade. This program would provide children with the chance to catch up earlier on basic skills so they are developmentally ready to acquire higher skills during the regular kindergarten period. The Legislature chose not to adopt this initiative.

The Department of Education has developed, published and provided training on a three- and four-year old comprehensive pre-kindergarten curriculum. The Department also operates a Head Start Collaborative Office designed to ensure that public schools blend services with Head Start Centers.

Delta State University has assumed a leadership in two initiatives: the Delta Education Initiative and the Delta Health Initiative. Both have components which address the educational and health needs of the birth to kindergarten population of the State. Moreover, the Center for Community Development is working with small communities throughout the Delta to assist them in efforts to empower families to strengthen parenting skills.

MSU's Early Childhood Institute works to develop and maintain a leadership program whereby individuals are prepared to guide early childhood policy; to improve the quality of care and education of children prior to their entrance into school and through third grade; and, to assist communities in building partnerships with families and schools and to support families as their child's first and most important teacher.

*Priority Three: Boost the quality of teaching and learning in our elementary and secondary schools.*

Students who have effective teachers make significant gains in learning while students who have ineffective teachers fail to make significant gains in learning. Mississippi's Public Education Forum released its Task Force on Teacher Quality recommendations in January 2003. These recommendations provided action steps to be taken in the areas of compensation and professional advancement, recruitment and retention, teacher education, professional development, and school leadership to have a qualified, competent and caring teacher in every classroom in Mississippi.

Mississippi ranks sixth in the nation in the number of National Board Certified teachers. Governor Musgrove sits on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that oversees National Board certification. He hosted a reception in February 2003 to recognize and honor the 321 Mississippi teachers who earned National Board certification in 2002.

MDE is offering several avenues for current teachers to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind's highly qualified teacher requirement by the 2005-2006 school year. The Department is enhancing teacher quality and student learning by encouraging the use of collaborative work such as curriculum mapping, peer coaching study teams and student intervention teams.

The Teach Mississippi Institute offers teachers instruction in education, effective teaching strategies, classroom management, state curriculum requirements, planning and instruction, instructional methods and pedagogy, and use of test results to improve instruction. A partnership between the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and four universities, the Institute provides an intensive eight-week, nine semester hour program.

*Priority Four: Increase college and university graduation rates.*

Our schools must have adequate resources to prepare our students. That is why it is so important that we invest in education first. However, not all states are making education their priority and some are reducing the number of college courses available to students. Under Governor Musgrove's leadership as Chairman, the Southern Regional Education Board has utilized technology to ensure that students can graduate on time. The Board's Electronic Campus provides a "marketplace" of more than 8,000 online courses from colleges and universities that can make available "virtual seats" to help replace those lost due to fewer college courses, sections and seats available to students because of reduced investments in higher education.

MDE is addressing dropout prevention and is seeking to improve graduation rates through early intervention and preparation via an aligned state curriculum and assessment system.

Gear Up Mississippi is a premier network of educational services aimed at enhancing the educational environment and broadening support for Mississippi students who live in economically limited communities and who represent areas with limited entry into post-secondary training opportunities. The Initiative accomplishes this task by working with 37 K-12 school districts to provide the services needed by the each district to ensure students enter post-secondary education.

*Priority Five: Dramatically expand adult life-long learning, worker training, and professional development.*

MDE's Office of Vocational and Technical Education works to increase life-long learning, worker training and professional development activities by establishing partnerships with business and industry.

The Global Education Mobile, a partnership between NASA and the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, provides for workforce enhancement and professional development in the area of remote sensing; strategic community planning opportunities and resources for education and economic development; education and educational technology professional development for teachers and college faculty; academic and career enhance activities for students; workforce training and professional development in areas that require access to modern computer technologies and software applications. The Mobile accomplishes this task by traveling to communities, schools, and conferences offering the available educational services.

*Priority Six: Increase the level of activity in university research and development, increase the higher education community's efforts to address state and community economic development needs and to prepare students for careers in the new economy.*

Governor Musgrove introduced the Mississippi Brain Trust during his 2003 State of the State Address. The Mississippi Brain Trust would use \$200 million in bonds – \$20 million a year over the next 10 years - to develop an intellectual infrastructure. The Brain Trust would build a reservoir of professors to develop new ideas and to prepare our workforce for the highly skilled jobs of today and tomorrow. University, college, and community college research and training will aid in the recruitment and retention of the world's best scholars. The Brain Trust will strengthen Mississippi's intellectual capacity by endowing chairs and professors at our universities and colleges and funding graduate student assistantships; sabbaticals with business and industry; major equipment purchases; and, workforce training. The Legislature did not choose to support the Brain Trust.

The Mississippi Space Commerce Initiative, a partnership between NASA and the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, serves to create the workforce necessary for Mississippi to become the nation's leader in commercial remote sensing research, product development, and services; devise and implement innovative approaches for exposing K-12 students to remote sensing; train and educate students to populate the space remote sensing industry; and coordinate all educational activities relating to the Initiative. The Initiative accomplishes this task through the funding of various projects.

The Mississippi Automated Resource Information System uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to manage and apply geographic information to a wide range of natural and cultural resource programs in order to develop a unified, comprehensive approach to geographic information technology.

*Building Opportunity in Mississippi* also provided a framework to sustain these commitments and strengthen accountability for this public agenda. The report recommended that an education coordinating entity be established to align policies and practices across educational sectors and that the state consider creating a Mississippi Education Progress Board to assess educational progress at all levels.

Although the Legislature did not adopt legislation supported by the Governor's Office creating an Education Progress Board, the State Superintendent of Education, the Executive Director of the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges and the Commissioner of Higher Learning have initiated regular meetings among themselves and their staff to align

policies and practices across sectors. In addition, the Governor initiated a regular monthly breakfast meeting with the three chiefs to discuss issues facing education as a whole and to foster cooperation and coordination among the state's three educational systems.