

Realizing the Results from Years of Investing in Education

Recall a time in Mississippi's history when our schools were not air conditioned, when our teacher's salaries averaged \$19,000 a year and teachers often used that money to buy their own school supplies. This did not occur 50 years ago or even 25 years ago; this was the state of Mississippi's educational system just a little over 10 years ago.

Mississippi cannot afford to turn back the hands of time on education. We cannot lose the momentum we have started. Education is our top priority and must remain our top priority. I have said this time and time again; education is the foundation from which Mississippi builds all future successes.

For years, we have invested in our educational system in Mississippi. This investment is for our children – for our state – for our future. Today, we are seeing the results of this investment. Mississippi is focused on education, and we are reaping the benefits.

A state's investment in education takes more than a year to notice. Mississippi is now seeing the results of our past efforts, but our successes can be torn down in much less time, if we stop the investment.

Our children have the opportunity for a better life in Mississippi because of the gains made in education. We must continue to move ahead. Today, the nation is taking notice.

Many of us have a family member or a close friend who is employed in the field of education. We trust and expect them to educate our children. We want them to give our children their very best. If we are not paying competitive salaries for our teachers, they will leave Mississippi to find jobs in other states or leave the field of teaching altogether.

When I first began working as a public servant, teacher salaries in Mississippi were the lowest in the nation. We want professionals teaching our children, but we were unwilling to pay for the best. Raising teacher pay was the most critical issue facing the people of Mississippi. I repeated this statement all through my campaign, and most people thought it could not be done. Today, our teacher's salaries average over \$28,000, and we are raising them to the Southeastern average. This raise will take Mississippi from 49th to 19th in the nation.

Mississippi was spending fewer dollars on education than almost ever other state in the nation. Today our schools have tech-prep centers and Internet access, and we are well on our way to placing an Internet-accessible computer in every classroom in Mississippi by 2002. Our children are preparing for a high-tech world because our schools are equipped for this high-tech education. This is because education is our top priority, and we are investing in education.

We are investing in education because our children are our greatest resource, and we want them to be successful, productive citizens.

We have worked too hard; we cannot stop this investment. Our children need our continued commitment, and they have that commitment from me. They have that commitment from my administration; we are working for education.

Mississippi cannot afford to take steps backward. Neighboring states and the nation are looking to Mississippi to find out what we are doing right. We must continue to show the world that Mississippi is ahead of the game, and we plan to stay there.