

*Remarks for the
Mississippi Partners in Education
Governor's Awards Luncheon
October 16, 2001*

Thank you, Beth, for that introduction and for the invitation to join you here today for this first annual Governor's Awards luncheon.

As you know, education is the priority of my administration, and I am eager to honor those who contribute so much to the future of our state by building a strong foundation in our students.

We have seen dramatic and positive changes in Mississippi regarding education in the past few months.

During a special session in July, the Legislature wisely removed the last obstacle to a true commitment to our teachers. Now, we are on a path that will raise the average teacher's salary from 49th to 19th in the nation over the next few years. We will pay our teachers as the professionals they are, a payment that is long overdue.

I'm proud that Mississippi is being seen as a leader in education by other states. In fact, the day after the July special session, The New York Times published an editorial praising the work we had done together.

Mississippi, according to The Times, had – with its scarce resources and small economy – put together the type of package that continues to elude New York.

I don't know about you, but I think it's about time Mississippi set the standard in educational progress in our country. And, we're doing it in other areas of education as well.

Community support and partnerships for our schools are a foundation for accomplishing great things. We are seeing increased participation in parent organizations and a higher level of investment from communities in their schools.

I just spoke about setting the standard.

Through an exciting public-private partnership currently underway, Mississippi is on target to be the first state in the nation with an internet-accessible computer in every public school classroom.

The “Computers in the Classroom” project is a wonderful partnership between the state and private business. We are raising money to purchase computers, and businesses are also donating used computers that are well suited to our needs.

Not too long ago, AmSouth Bank, Union Planters Bank and State Farm Insurance donated 850 computers to our effort. What a great investment in our future, and think about what our children will do with those computers.

They are growing up and preparing to work in an economy that will be borderless, wireless and global; and they will have access to the technology they need, right from the start.

If we think outside the box, if we create our own opportunities, there is no limit to what we can do for education in Mississippi.

“Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance,” wrote the great historian Will Durant.

We’re here to honor those who understand Durant’s words, who realize that education is a never-ending process, who believe there is always something new and exciting to learn.

There is a Chinese proverb that says
“learning is a treasure that will follow its
owner everywhere.” Thank you for your
work in helping reveal the treasure for our
children.