

STRUGGLES

...a publication of **Southern Echo, Inc.**

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Education stakeholders confer to build bases to dismantle historic student achievement gap structures

More than 300 attend 4-day session at Mississippi Valley State University

Itta Bena, MS – During Nov. 16–17, 2004, a cross-section of more than 300 stakeholders from the Delta region in Mississippi attended a conference to look at the achievement gap through three lenses: the nature of the student achievement gap, what needs to be done to dismantle the gap, and how we can fund the remedies needed.

Subsequently, on Nov. 18-19, more than 35 activists from 8 southern states who had been attending the conference convened at Valley to debrief and evaluate the conference and explore how work on these issues can be undertaken by grassroots communities in each of their states to build a regional process.

Conference participants included parents, students, educators, school board members, superintendents, state education officials, state university officials and community activists.

The primary goal of the conference was to bring together this diverse group

of stakeholders, across race, class, gender, generational and status lines, who were not accustomed to working together, in order to experiment with finding common ground on which to build the work needed to dismantle the student achievement gap.

The gathering resulted from a partnership negotiated by Southern Echo with the State Dept. of Education and MS Valley State University. The partners co-sponsored the conference and coordinated the work to put it together.

At the same time, some of the older, maturing black-based, black-led grassroots community groups from across the Delta provided invaluable organizing assistance to engage and prepare parents, students and school officials for the work of the conference. These groups included *Citizens for Quality Education* (Holmes County), *Indianola Parent Student Group* (Sunflower County), *Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County* (Tunica County), *Citizens for a Better Greenville* (Washington County)... **-Cont'd p. 6**

Grassroots organizations in Delta and Hills generate huge turnout of parents and students at Gap Conference

Impressive youth participation from Greenville, Tunica and Pontotoc schools

Itta Bena, MS – It was mid-week when parents were supposed to be at work and students in school. But more than 250 from at least 27 counties came to the Gap conference to learn and share thinking about how to dismantle the structures that sustain the disparity in student achievement across race and class lines.

Especially impressive to the conference planners were the more than 70

students who came on their school buses after receiving cooperation and permission from their school principals and superintendents to attend the conference as an educational opportunity.

The huge turnout resulted from a concerted, systematic effort undertaken by six black-based, black-led grassroots community organizations, with financial and hands-on technical support from Southern Echo.

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I thought the GAP Conference was a wonderful opportunity for parents and students to come together with other stakeholders to begin a partnership for building education throughout the Delta. I think what is equally important is the demonstration that parents and students are engaging themselves in education and are committed to continuing in the process to better education.

-Helen Johnson

Southern Echo staff, Holmes County School Board Member

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STUDENT INTERNS

Greg Johnson

The Dismantling the Achievement Gap Conference provided an opportunity for parents, students, and concerned citizens to reaffirm their understanding around what it really takes to ensure a quality education for all children... qualified teachers, justice funding, and an empowered community.

-Joyce Hall-Parker
CBG Executive Director,
Echo Board Member

Echo analysis of MS Dept. of Ed 2001-2004 test data shows sustained race and class achievement disparity

Data shows that narrow focus on test scores has not solved problems

Itta Bena, MS – When Southern Echo staff used MS Dept. of Education student test data in reading and math from 2001 through 2004 to follow the same children as they changed grades, the linear analysis revealed that on a statewide basis students began school with a major gap along race and class lines.

The data also revealed that the extent of the achievement gap grew worse as the students moved up in grade. [See chart illustrations.]

The test data measured the percentage of students that scored proficient or above on the Mississippi Curriculum Test from 2001 through 2004 in reading and math.

Black students began 2nd grade 17 percentage points behind white students in both reading and math. However, the

black and low-wealth children moving from 2nd through 4th grade, and the black and low-wealth children moving from 3rd to 5th grade, held their ground and did not appear to lose ground.

Thereafter is a different story: The black and low-wealth children moving from 4th through 6th, 5th through 7th, and 6th through 8th have experienced dramatic collapses in achievement in both reading and math. In addition, this has also resulted in a substantial widening of the gap when compared to white students in the same grade levels on a statewide basis.

For example, the data for the same children moving from the 5th through 7th grades shows that the gap between white and black students was 24 percentage points (90% of the whites students scored proficient or above versus 66% of the black students.)

-Cont'd p.9

Achievement gap disparities are intended consequences of conscious policies; 1868 Hampton Plan designed to create 2nd class education to deny 1st class citizenship

Education used as final bulwark to maintain control of black community

Itta Bena, MS – The Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865 to abolish slavery did not establish black freedom. The battle was on and white resistance was fierce.

To counter the 13th Amendment, southern legislatures, including Mississippi, passed the so-called Black Codes in 1865 to impose upon persons of African descent all of the badges and indicia of slavery without the legal label.

In response, the US Congress passed the 1866 Civil Rights Act to provide substantially the same civil rights for black persons that whites already had.

Defiantly, the southern states contended that black persons might have civil rights, but that does not confer citizenship upon them. Therefore, southern states said, if you are not a citizen then you cannot vote, and if you are not registered to vote you cannot sit on a civil or

criminal jury, and cannot obtain a jury of your peers in court to protect or enforce rights. Not the least of it, they said, if you cannot register to vote then you cannot seek public office.

Fighting back, the US Congress and those states still in the Union adopted the 14th Amendment that sought to create and guarantee to a person of African descent both national citizenship and citizenship in the state in which that person resides, due process and equal protection of the laws, and all of the rights, privileges and immunities of citizenship.

Although the right to vote is a basic freedom in a representative democracy or republic, the southern states argued that citizenship did not automatically confer the right to vote.

So, Congress and the Union states had to go to the well again to adopt the 15th Amendment to create and guarantee the right to vote.

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Test Data Analysis, cont'd from p.2

READING GAP

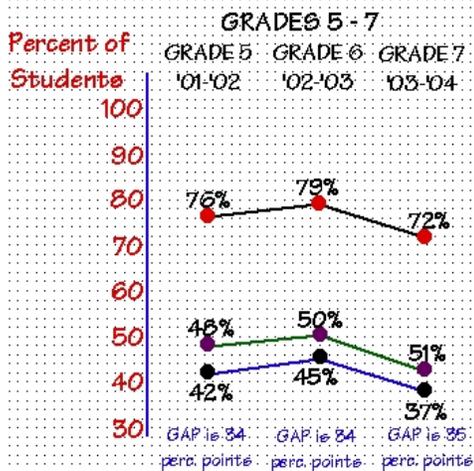
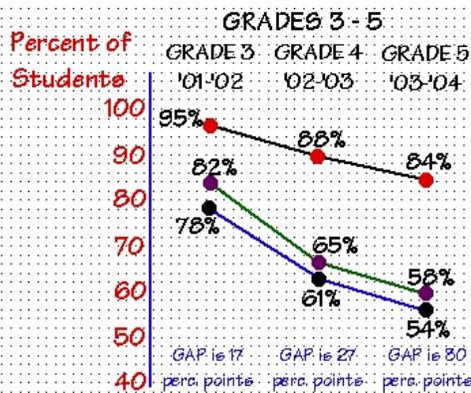
2001-2004

THIS DATA SHOWS THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SCORING PROFICIENT OR ABOVE ON THE MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST FOR READING -- 2001-2004

MATH GAP

2001-2004

THIS DATA SHOWS THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SCORING PROFICIENT OR ABOVE ON THE MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST FOR MATHEMATICS -- 2001-2004



2001-2004 Test Data provided by the Mississippi Dept. of Education based on state standardized tests.

By the 7th grade the gap grew to 32 percentage points (79% of the white students scored proficient or above versus 47% of the black students).

The data shows that during the 3-year period black children lost substantial ground because the number of children testing proficient or better declined by 19 percentage points. At the same time, white student performance also took a hit, declining 11 percentage points. All communities have cause for concern.

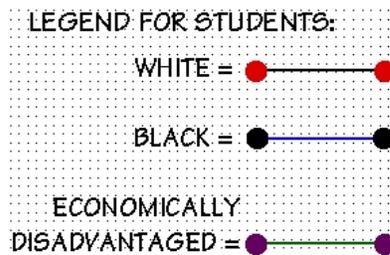
A review of the children who moved from 6th through 8th grade also provides a grim picture. The gap in the 6th grade between black and white students was 28 percentage points (85% for white children; 57% for black children). By the time they reach the 8th grade, the gap has widened to 37 percentage points (80% for white children; 43% for black children).

This means that by 8th grade 57 of every 100 black children in the 6th to 8th grade public school group were unable to achieve proficient or above in reading.

A look at the math scores for children in the same grade ranges demonstrates similar outcomes. For example, in the 5th through 7th grade testing, the gap between black and white students in terms of percentage of students that scored proficient or above was 34 percentage points (76% for white children; 42% for black children).

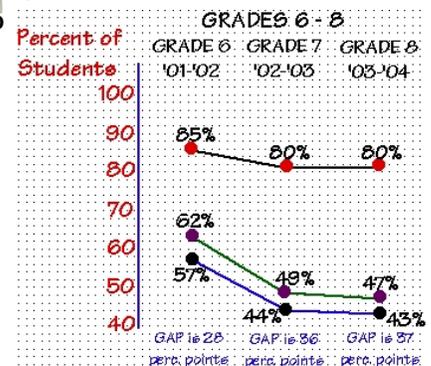
This means that by the 7th grade for this group of children 58 of every 100 black children were unable to score at proficient or above in mathematics. The scores for white children also show great need for improvement, too, but the wide gap in achievement remains.

These charts are part of a more extensive set of data charts prepared by Southern Echo for the November Gap Conference.



It is great whenever you can get together with stakeholders to work around student achievement – which is very important to the state's economic growth. I think it was absolutely wonderful, another step in the right direction. The conference itself was very positive.

-Washington Cole
Communications & Legislative Services Director, MDE



Dismantling vs. Closing Gap: Improving test scores not enough; holistic approach needed

The conference was great and very informative for parents and community. I really admire what you all (Southern Echo) do in terms of educating parents and community. I thought it was great!

-Judy Rhodes

Fmr. Director of the Office of Accountability, MDE (Retired)

The problems that underlie the dropout problem are essentially the same that result in the under-preparation of students, particularly children in the schools in the Mississippi Delta.

Note: *the following is a joint statement of MS Department of Education, MS Valley State University and Southern Echo, Inc.*

Jackson, MS: The student achievement gap across race and class lines continues to plague public school districts throughout the Mississippi Delta. This is not because children don't want to learn or because their parents and grandparents do not care about education. The under-preparation of black children results from significant structural elements in Mississippi's public school system that must be changed in fundamental ways to deliver the quality, first-rate education to which the children and their families are entitled from legal, moral and common-sense points of view.

Recent policies and strategies of the Mississippi Department of Education, working with local school districts, have resulted in trends that show improvement in performance of students on standardized tests. At the same time, however, in the fall of 2004 State Superintendent of Education Dr. Henry Johnson told a joint session of the Senate and House Education Committees that far more "profound changes" are needed. The MS Department of Education estimates that the public school student dropout rate is 40 percent.

Children who have dropped out of school are not factored into the calculation as to whether schools are meeting their benchmarks for improvement. These children do not receive a diploma, do not tend to have the skills to compete for available jobs, few jobs are waiting for them, and so they land on the streets with nothing to do. This is a prescription for winding up in the pipeline from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse.

At present, Supt. Johnson notes, there are approximately 500,000 children in the public schools. That means that we can expect that 4 out of every 10 children, 40 out of 100 children, and 200,000 of the 500,000 children in school today will not finish high school. These children, who will be the parents and adult citizens of tomorrow, will need to support themselves, their children and

families, and have a means through which to be productive within their communities. This framework is undermined when they cannot get the education to which they are entitled.

The problems that underlie the dropout problem are essentially the same that result in the under-preparation of students, particularly children in the schools in the Mississippi Delta. The Delta public schools continue to suffer from the impact of past deprivations imposed during segregation upon the formerly black public schools, when under-preparation of black children was the intended consequence of conscious policies.

Delta public schools, as with so many districts across the state, do not have sufficient financial resources to meet the education needs of children, including children with special needs. Many districts suffer from critical teacher shortages and many districts scramble to find persons to cover the classes, in which they are monitoring more than teaching. In many districts teachers are teaching out of their certification. The extensive use of emergency certificates, long-term substitutes, and national teacher programs to bring recent college graduates to Mississippi for a year or two to gain experience reflect the lack of teaching staff stability and longevity. Further, the data reveals majority black and low-wealth school districts tend to have the least experienced teachers, the highest teacher shortages, and the most teachers assigned to classes for which they have not been trained.

The data reveals that students who are exposed to inadequate teaching for two consecutive years, especially in the early years, are at high risk to drop out later because their under-preparation in reading and math undermines their ability to sustain effective work as the demands to build upon these basic skills increase in later grades. When this happens, the door to learning that is supposed to be there fails to open. In many school districts when students experience academic or emotional difficulties...

-Cont'd p. 9

Huge Turnout, cont'd from pg.1

These groups are based strategically across the Delta and in the hill country adjacent to the Delta.

From September into November meetings were held in schools, community centers, offices of the local organizations, and the homes of parents and students to talk about the history of policies that created and sustain the achievement gap, the capacity of the community to impact policy and effect change, the nature of the opposition to quality education for all children, the remedies needed to transform the culture of public education, and how best to fund it.

At least 214 parents and students pre-registered for the conference through the local meeting process, but more than 250 came to the conference.

The students demonstrated that their readiness and willingness to play a meaningful role in these policy fights by the leadership they provided in the small group sessions and the clarity of their voices during the reports back to the main body.

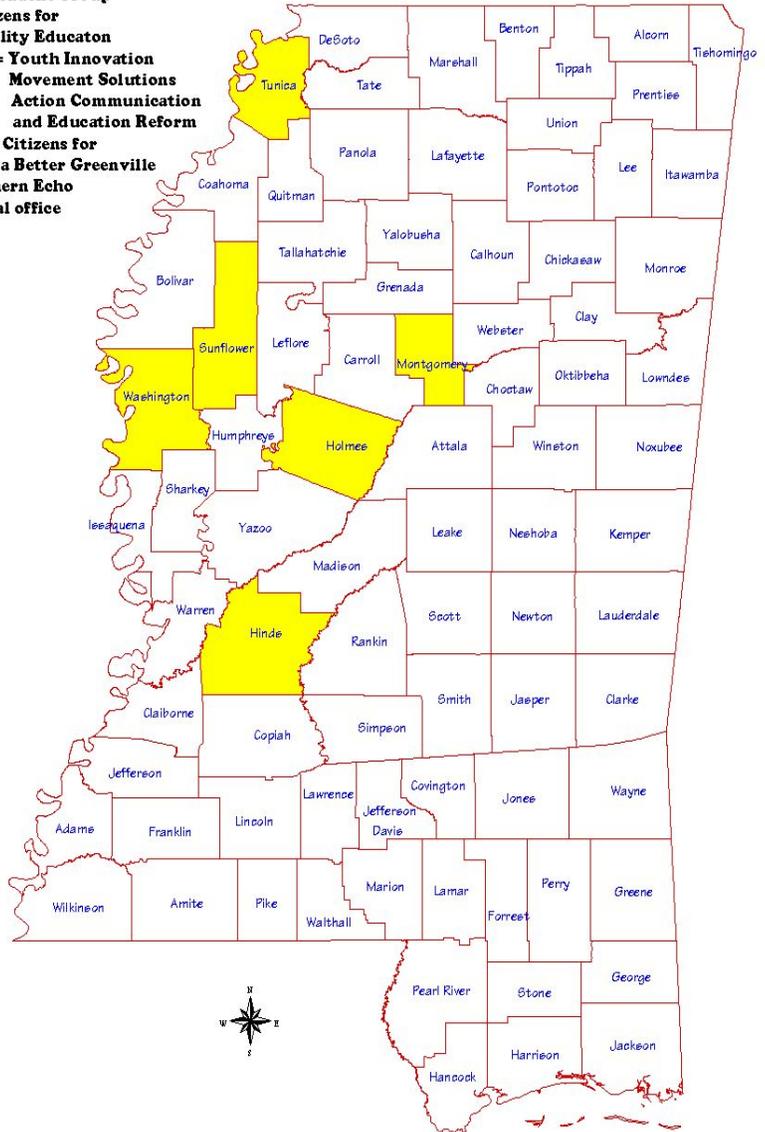
Many of the parents and educators expressed how impressed they were with the insights and understanding put forth by their younger counterparts, which some of the elders conceded they did not entirely expect.

Both Ashley McKay and Gregory Johnson received standing ovations for their presentations to the main body on achievement gap issues from a student's perspective. Ms. McKay is a junior at Rosa Fort High School in Tunica County and has been active since her pre-teens with Concerned Citizens. Mr. Johnson is a freshman at Tougaloo College, a recent graduate of the public schools in Humphreys County, has been active with Citizens for Quality Education in Holmes County for several years, and is now a student intern with Southern Echo.



- Tunica = Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**
- Sunflower = Indianola Parent Student Group**
- Holmes = Citizens for Quality Education**
- Montgomery = Youth Innovation Movement Solutions Action Communication and Education Reform**
- and**
- Washington = Citizens for a Better Greenville**
- Hinds = Southern Echo central office**

These organizations were instrumental in creating the huge turnout for the Dismantling the Gap Conference



The Gap conference was long overdue but I am glad that we were able to work with Southern Echo to pull it off. I found out about the gap in black and white education in Mississippi as a student in MS Delta Schools for Colored and by having children and grandchildren matriculate through the segregated and "integrated" school system. The growth in the prison population is the saddest testimony to the outcome of the learning, socialization, and achievement gap continuum. I hope the conference will enhance the dialogue of the role of quality education for all children as the foundation of a secure economic and social future for Mississippians.

-Dr. L.C. Dorsey
Delta Research & Cultural Institute, M. V. S. U.

Education Stakeholders, cont'd from p.1

It was definitely worthwhile and a conference that we need to continue. We definitely need community to buy in and the GAP Conference showed the community's responsiveness. I just had a ball!!

-Dr. Bonita Potter

Associate Superintendent of
Academic Education, MDE

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www.southernecho.org!

The conference helped to reaffirm that HBCUs have a significant role to play in helping to dismantle the achievement gap. It is in the short term and long term interest to forge partnerships with organizations that are working like Southern Echo to address those problems.

-Dr. Marvin Haire

?????????

...and *Youth Innovation Movement Solutions* (Montgomery County). These groups each took responsibility for bringing parents, students and school officials from their own counties and from adjacent or nearby counties.

Mississippi Valley State University hosted the conference at its Itta Bena campus and coordinated logistical support. The MS State Dept. of Education published the conference materials prepared by Southern Echo, which used up-to-date student achievement data provided by the State Dept. of Education to buttress its analysis.

During the initial 2-day session presentations were given that analyzed the data that documented the extent of the achievement gap, the history of conscious state and local education policies that created the achievement gap, how the structures of public education sustain the gap, and what we need to do to dismantle these structures to provide a quality, first-rate education for all students.

Participants were divided into small group sessions twice during the conference. Delegates from each constituency were assigned to each small group to create diversity and generate discussions among those who normally did not communicate much with each other. Each group reported back to the main body on its analysis of the two questions presented:

What do we as stakeholders need to dismantle the achievement gap and how can we work together to obtain what we need? and

How do we as stakeholders work together to obtain the funding needed to dismantle the achievement gap?

This proved to be an effective experiment, as observers reported and the reports back demonstrated, that the discussions were lively, friendly, supportive and productive.

Southern Echo, State Dept. of Education and MS Valley State University leadership agreed to sustain this initial process in order to generate the policies and funding needed at the state and local levels.



Upgrade 2005 denies full funding of education, attacks State Dept. of Ed, blames students for education woes

Governor Barbour pits "no tax increase" against law requiring full funding of education

Jackson, MS – In January, 2005 Gov. Haley Barbour launched an education initiative entitled, "Upgrade Education Reform Act of 2005" to counter mounting pressure from parents, students, educators, state education officials and legislators to provide full funding for the MS Adequate Education Program (MAEP) as required by state law.

At the heart of the Governor's education plan is his commitment to no tax increases, notwithstanding that underfunding of MAEP will diminish the capacity of most school districts to provide the quality education to which the students are entitled under existing state and federal accountability standards.

Barbour's perspective reflects the fact that during the formulation process for *Upgrade 2005* Barbour did not consult with the communities and stakeholders that would be most affected by his plan. Barbour brought in teachers, administrators, business leaders and academics, but not parents, students, or grassroots organizations closely identified with education reform efforts in the state.

Funding issues are not the only controversial aspect of Barbour's plan. *Upgrade 2005* is an attack on the efforts during the past decade by the State Dept. of Education and the legislature to implement uniform statewide standards through which to hold local school districts accountable for the delivery of an effective education for all students in the districts.

Hampton Plan, Cont'd from p. 2

It took another 95 years, the Movement of the 50s and 60s, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, before the right to vote for black and other minorities could be reasonably secured.

It was during Reconstruction in Mississippi that black communities led the fight to create the first public education system. The creation of a publicly funded education system accessible to black families was a major cultural transformation, since during slavery teaching a person of African descent to read or write was a crime.

For this very reason it was seen as a major threat to the capacity of the white planters to sustain domination and control of their black population. In many counties in Mississippi, for example, the black population proportion was as high as 90 percent.

The white establishment, working with several northern financiers, created an extraordinary strategy to limit, hinder, undermine and thwart the drive by the black community for an education system that would open the gate to analytical, political, economic, educational and cultural independence.

The plan, first put forth in 1868, came to be known as the "Hampton Plan", named for Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia.

In his award-winning history, "The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935", Professor James D. Anderson set forth the three prongs of the Hampton Plan:

1. Young black men and women must not get a liberal arts education. That is, no literature, philosophy, mathematics, strategic or critical thinking skills;
2. Young black men and women must not get training in trades or enterprise that will enable them to compete economically, and
3. Young black men and women must internalize the fundamental principle that politics is "white folks' business"!

In order to accomplish these goals, new schools were created across the southern states to attract black men and women to obtain the education they sought.

These schools operated under strict guidelines rooted in the 3 principles described above with which administra-

tors, teachers and students had to comply.

As a result, the curriculum of the schools focused on providing students with skills in agricultural, industrial and business trades, rather than academic skills. But, the skills provided were designed to be limited, so that the person could function as an apprentice or a subordinate employee, rather than an independent artisan with the capacity to compete with white businessmen as an entrepreneur.

The brilliance of the strategy was that on the surface it embraced the concept of education, created a place where the education could be obtained, and technically it was more education than had been previously available to black persons.

Further, several very prominent black individuals accepted key roles to make the process work that created a veneer of acceptability.

These schools were designed to gate-keep the true capacity of the black community to take its rightful place in the politics, economics and culture of the society at large. The structures created to keep the gate closed have been adapted across the generations to address the great changes in the economy and the culture.

The current achievement gap and its related disparities are the direct consequence of these conscious policies begun in the 1860s.

In his extraordinary work, "Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow", Univ. of Southern Miss. Prof. Emeritus Neil McMillen stated:

"Black education in Jim Crow Mississippi was separate but never equal. Paying little lip service to a dual system of public education, the state invested most of its meager school dollars throughout the half-century after 1890 in the education of its white minority. 'It will be readily admitted by every white man in Mississippi,' state Supt. of Education A. A. Kincannon wrote in 1899, 'that our public school system is designed primarily for the welfare of the white children of the state, and incidentally for the negro children.'"

"It will be readily admitted by every white man in Mississippi, that our public school system is designed primarily for the welfare of the white children of the state, and incidentally for the negro children."

-Fmr. State
Superintendent
of Education
A.A. Kincannon
(1899)



Upgrade 2005, cont'd from p.7

The Gap Conference was a gathering of the greatest intellectual minds – community people, MDE, and the higher education community – concerning schools and their problems, specifically student achievement. It was one of the most innovative and refreshing conferences concerning education to date.

–Gregory Johnson

Southern Echo Student Intern

Barbour's plan brings race and class tensions to the forefront, through the veil of preventing school violence, by encouraging more intensive use of the Youth Court and ignoring alternative, less extreme, and *more* cost-efficient methods suggested by parents, students, & the community.

The education standards act of 1998 and school accountability measure in 2000 have helped to end Mississippi's historic grip on last place and its environs in national evaluations of education quality.

Undaunted by this evidence of improvement, Barbour attacks the State Dept. of Education as a "state bureaucracy" from which successful schools must be "liberated". The governor is trying to paint the accountability process as an entanglement of rigid and complex administrative procedures that impedes effective, creative actions by local school districts.

These attacks come just when the State Dept. of Education and grassroots organizations, parents and students have begun to work together to support the enforcement of accountability standards to end the achievement gap and reduce the dropout rates in all schools.

In response, the Governor is attempting to drive wedges within the ranks of education stakeholders. For example, in 2004 he embraced the financial needs of the junior colleges as more urgent than the obligation to fully fund MAEP. In 2005 the Governor has positioned full funding of teacher pay raises against full funding of MAEP and is characterizing the State Dept. of Education as the enemy of effective public education strategies.

The governor's strategy is to put the State Dept. of Education on the defensive during the legislative session where these policy struggles will play out. It also comes on the watch of the first black state superintendent of education in the history of the state, who participated in the Dismantling the Gap Conference held in Nov. 2004.

Gregory Johnson, a first-year Tougaloo College student who reviewed the governor's plan, stated:

"Upgrade's efforts can be seen as a direct attack at the efforts and campaigns of involved community groups and persons who have been working to create uniform standards for education across the state and a means to enforce them.

"High expectations and delivery for all children in public schools in Mississippi is at stake. What happens to minority,



Upgrade 2005 pits an 8%, 3-year span teacher pay raise vs. a fully-funded MAEP.

special needs, or low socio-economic status children in schools where there is no monitoring of what is taught and no way to hold individuals accountable for what goes on inside the classroom? If schools are granted the independence to operate without any input from the MS Dept. of Education, or the 'state bureaucracy' as classified by *Upgrade*, then the accountability standards are useless."

The governor, in his plan, also plays to the race and class anxieties of many teachers by raising the specter of violence in the schools and calling for more intensive use of the Youth Court, as the primary counter-measures through which to enforce discipline against students. The governor's plan ignores the kind of alternative strategies promoted by leading education analysts and Mississippi grassroots organizations, such as more effective classroom management, implementation of student assessments and services that are already required by law, conflict resolution strategies, and more effective teacher development at the college level and in the schools.

Struggles wishes to thank Mr. Gregory Johnson, a first-year student at Tougaloo College near Jackson, MS, for his invaluable contribution to the analysis in this article. Mr. Johnson, from Humphreys County, MS, formerly worked with Citizens for Quality Education in Holmes County, MS, and is now a Student Intern with Southern Echo.



Dismantling vs. Closing, cont'd from p. 4

...the children are not given the assessments or support services required by and funded under federal and state law, notwithstanding that the goal of these programs is to buttress the ability of students to stay in school, adjust and achieve.

All the studies demonstrate that meaningful parental involvement in the life of the schools, including the formation and implementation of policy, are essential to create an effective opportunity for each child to obtain a quality public education. Although required under Mississippi law, many school districts in the Delta do not encourage or support effective parent participation, and where they do it has made a distinct difference.

Many Delta school districts make extensive use of suspensions and expulsions as a primary response to school discipline issues, effectively putting huge numbers of children out of the education process and marking them for failure, causing them to fall behind their age group, and eventually to drop out. That is counter-productive. Research shows that these forms of disciplinary response tend to be utilized more in majority black and low-wealth school districts.

These problems are structural in nature. If closing the achievement gap across race and class lines is to be sustained throughout the generations, it will not be sufficient to improve student performance on stan-

dardized tests. The underlying structures that create and sustain the gap must be removed and replaced with effective strategies that build the foundation necessary to create and sustain a quality, first-rate education for all children that recognizes and appreciates their different needs (see "Accomplish" below).

Delta school districts need focused policies and sufficient resources to create a culture that is rooted in the full preparation of all children. They need focused policies and sufficient resources to address the impact of past deprivations, to build effective policies and programs to engage parents and students, to expand the base of students and citizens from the Delta who become effective teachers in Delta schools, to build partnerships with the colleges and universities to prepare students for higher learning, to employ sufficient qualified teachers and administrators, to provide development programs for teachers, administrators and school boards, to deliver a full education curriculum and support programs and services to the children and their families, and to provide all of the necessary facilities in which to carry out the goals of the schools and the communities which they serve.

Mississippi Valley State University was delighted to host the 2004 "Dismantling the Education Gap" Conference in that the venue provided a unique opportunity for federal and state agency heads, the educators, community activists, politicians, community residents and most importantly consumers to critically examine factors contributing to the achievement gap. Furthermore, special attention was given to enhancing public/private partnerships in order to establish a more effective mechanism for addressing germane educational policy and practice issues.

-Dr. Moses Newsome

VP of Research, Planning,
Community & Economic
Development, M.V.S.U.

To accomplish a dismantled "Gap", we will need to:

- create a school culture that is rooted in the full preparation of all children;
- dramatically reduce the dropout rates and inappropriate use of suspensions and expulsions;
- shut down the pipeline from schoolhouse to jailhouse;
- address the impact of past deprivations in order to design effective policies for change;
- engage parents and students in the life of the school with an emphasis on students graduating with a quality education that effectively prepares them for college level, rather than remedial, curricula;
- implement a rigorous curriculum in all schools for all children;
- expand the base of students and

citizens that come from the Delta region who become effective teachers in the Delta schools;

- build partnerships with the colleges and universities to prepare students for higher learning;
- re-build among the historically black universities in the Delta development programs for teachers and administrators designed to prepare effective teachers and administrators, especially teachers and administrators of color, who are trained to employ best teaching practices;
- employ in Delta schools sufficient qualified teachers and administrators to end the critical teacher shortage in order to ensure all students receive a quality, challenging curriculum;
- provide development programs for

teachers, administrators and school boards,

- provide to students and families the assessments, support programs and services which they need to take full advantage of educational opportunities, and provide all of the necessary facilities in which to carry out the goals of the schools and the communities which they serve.
- build an understanding within grassroots communities, and among educators, legislators, and other public officials, of the necessity for "justice funding", not simply "equity" or "adequacy" funding, in order to provide to each school district sufficient resources to remedy the impact of past systemic deprivations within the public education systems in Mississippi.



Students from region high schools and M.V.S.U. speak after returning from small group discussions.



Hollis Watkins and Dr. L.C. Dorsey chat light and take notes during the Gap Conference.



Helen Johnson (R) makes a special presentation to Judy Rhodes (L) for her tremendous help to understand the concept of "justice funding".



A look at the parents, students and other concerned parties of the 2004 Gap Conference.



Conference participants as a North Carolina attendee discusses an issue.



MDE Communications and Legislative Director Washington Cole listens intently.

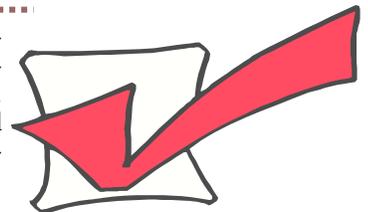
Struggles is a publication of *Southern Echo, Inc.*

Southern Echo, Inc. is a leadership development, education, and training organization working to develop and improve grassroots leadership among adults and young people throughout Mississippi and the southern region. *Southern Echo* emphasizes the importance of building strong community organizations through effective community organizing work, as the essential means to advance the goal of empowering the community.

ABOUT STRUGGLES...

Southern Echo provides active, on-going training, technical, and legal assistance to communities and individuals. *Southern Echo* also conducts residential training schools, workshops, and community meetings.

**For more information,
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