

**Mississippi Department of Education  
Mississippi Valley State University  
and  
Southern Echo, Inc.**

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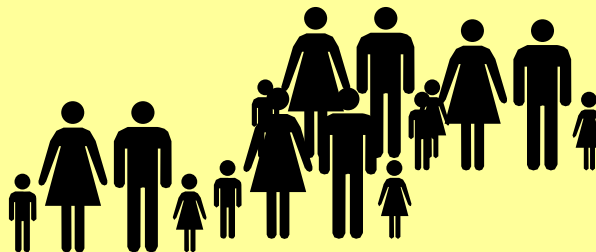
**The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of  
Mississippi Education Stakeholders on  
Dismantling the Achievement Gap:**

**Creating and Implementing Education Policy to  
Provide a Quality Education for Children At-Risk,  
Reduce Dropout and Maximize Graduation Rates,  
and  
Generate State Revenue  
Sufficient to Fully Fund Public Education**

**Monday, Nov. 12, 2007, 9:00 – 5:00**

**Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2007, 9:00 – 3:30**

**at Butts Social Science Building,  
MS Valley State University, Itta Bena, MS**



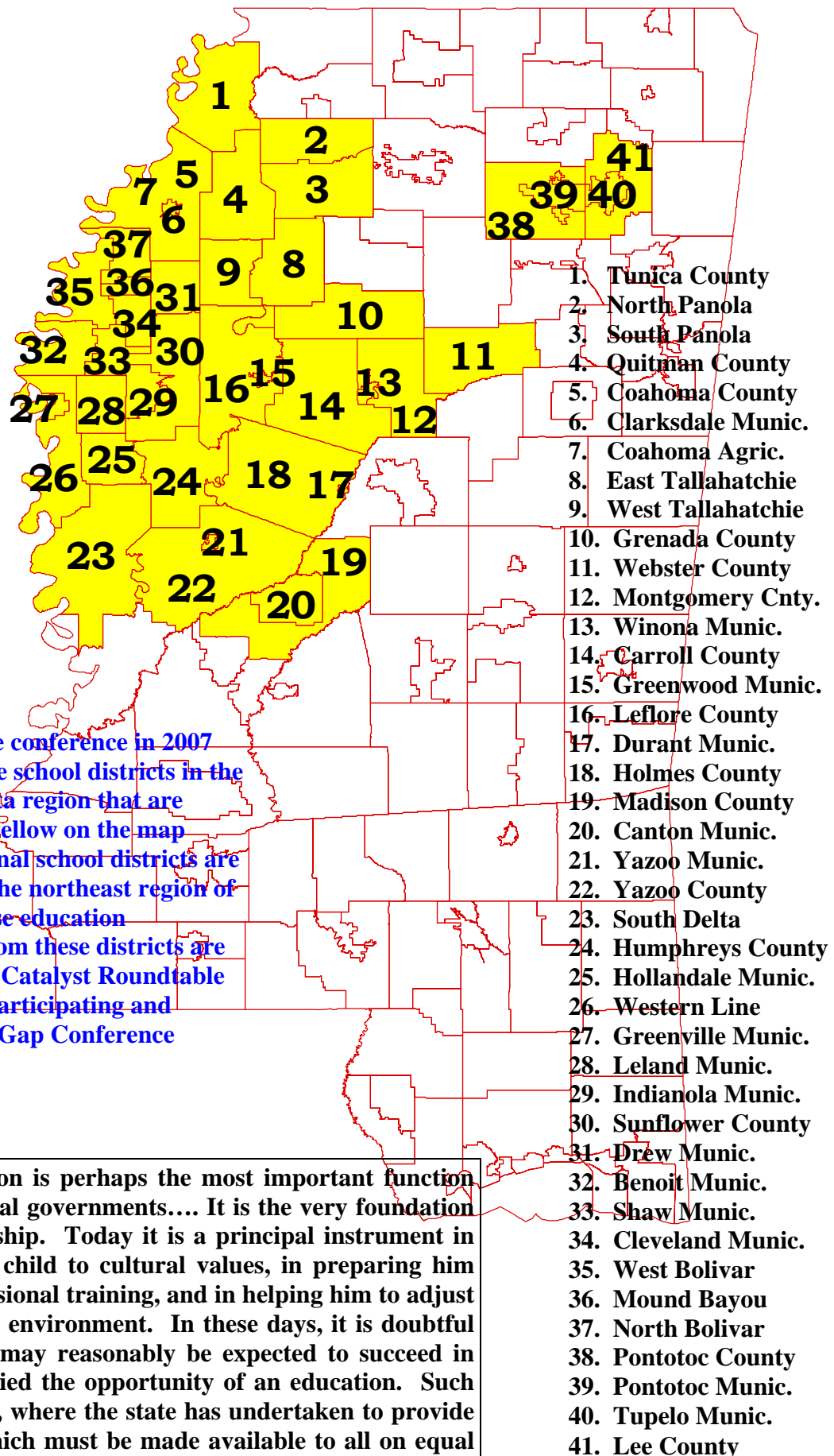
**For More Information, contact:**



**phone: 601-982-6400**

**fax: 601-982-2636**

**email: [souecho@bellsouth.net](mailto:souecho@bellsouth.net)**



The work of the conference in 2007 will focus on the school districts in the Mississippi Delta region that are highlighted in yellow on the map above. Additional school districts are highlighted in the northeast region of the state because education stakeholders from these districts are also part of the Catalyst Roundtable work and are participating and assisting in the Gap Conference process.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.... It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

*United States Supreme Court  
 Brown v. Board of Education, 1954*

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*To inquire, please contact:  
Southern Echo, Inc.  
P.O. Box 9306, Jackson, MS 39286*

*phone: 601-982-6400  
fax: 601-352-2636  
email: [souecho@bellsouth.net](mailto:souecho@bellsouth.net)*

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*Mississippi Department of Education Guidelines on Dropout Prevention*

*Mississippi Department of Education Guidelines on Dropout Assessment Process*

### **State Budget Process and Effective Funding of Public Education**

*Justice Funding: Using data and experimenting with language to clarify policy and strategy choices in the struggle to create a quality public education, revised April 2006, Southern Echo, Inc.*

*Putting the Pieces Together: A Taxpayer's Guide to the Mississippi Budget, September 12, 2007, Mississippi Economic Policy Center*

## **AGENDA -- Day One – Monday, November 12, 2007**

- 9:00 am**                      **Invocation**  
**Mr. Hollis Watkins**, President, Southern Echo, Inc.
- 9:05 am**                      **Welcome from**  
**Dr. Roy Hudson**, Interim President, Mississippi Valley State University  
**Dr. Beth H. Sewell**, Executive to the State Superintendent, MS Dept. of Education  
**Cong. Bennie Thompson** (D. - 2<sup>nd</sup> Dist.)  
**Mr. Hollis Watkins**, President, Southern Echo, Inc.
- 9:25 am**                      **Introduction of Participants**  
**Ms. Betty Petty**, Member, Indianola School District Board of Trustees  
Co-Coordinator, Indianola Parent Student Group  
Member, Mississippi Education Working Group and Delta Catalyst Roundtable  
Chair, Special Education Advisory Panel to MS Department of Education  
Senior Organizer, Southern Echo, Inc.
- Conference Co-Moderators:**  
**Ms. Brenda Hyde**, Asst. Director, Southern Echo, Inc.  
Master of Arts, Public Policy and Administration, Jackson State University  
Member-elect, Board of Directors, New World Foundation  
President, Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network  
**Mr. Gregory Johnson**, Senior; President, Student Government Association, Tougaloo College  
Intern, Southern Echo, Inc.
- 9:30 am**                      **Keynote Process**
- 9:30 am**                      **Overview of the 2007 Dismantling the Achievement Gap Conference –  
Why effective parent and student engagement at the local school district level is essential**  
**Mr. Leroy Johnson**, Executive Director, Southern Echo, Inc.  
Member, Board of Directors, Rural Schools and Community Trust  
Member, Board of Directors, Southern Partners Fund  
Member, MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable and MS Education Working Group  
Parent with children in the Holmes County School District
- 9:40 am**                      **Why strong leadership, effective classroom management, substantial increases in funding for  
targeted programs, and accountability are key to meeting the education needs of children at-risk**  
**Dr. Hank Bounds**, State Superintendent of Education  
(20 minute presentation; 10 minutes for Questions from audience)
- 10:10 am**                      **Dropout Prevention: State Guidelines, the Local Planning Process and Community Engagement  
A ground-breaking strategic approach to transformation of the culture of education**  
**Dr. Sheril Smith**, Director, Office of Dropout Prevention, MS Dept. of Education  
**Ms. Toni Kersh**, Dir., Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement, MS Dept. of Education  
(35 minute presentation; 15 minutes for Questions from audience)
- 11:00 am**                      **Who are the children at-risk in our public schools?  
What must we do to meet their needs so they can obtain the education to which they are entitled?**  
**Ms. Ashley McKay**, Sophomore, Jackson State University  
Intern, Southern Echo, Inc.  
Former Director, Tunica Teens in Action  
**Ms. Helen Johnson**, Member, Holmes County School Board  
Member, State Board of Education Practitioner's Committee on Standards  
Member, Special Education Advisory Panel to MS Department of Education  
Member, Board of Directors, Nollie Citizens for Quality Education (Holmes County)  
Member, MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable and MS Education Working Group  
Education Coordinator, Southern Echo, Inc.  
Parent with children in the Holmes County School District  
(20 minute presentation; 15 minutes for Questions from audience)
- 11:35 pm**                      **BREAK**

11:45 am	<p>Enforcing the rights of our children to be in school where they can learn and graduate on time</p> <p>A. The Mississippi Constitution guarantees the right to a <u>free public education</u></p> <p>B. Shut down the pipeline from schoolhouse to jailhouse: we have the right to expect the school discipline process to keep students in school where they can learn</p> <p>C. <u>The Teacher Support Team</u>: we are required to keep students in school while students and teachers get the support they need</p> <p>D. <u>The Dropout Prevention Team</u> and the <u>Dropout Prevention Plan</u>: the whole point is to keep students in school so they can graduate on time with the tools and skills they need</p> <p>E. The right to resist the abusive application of <u>school fees</u> and <u>dress code policies</u> that wrongfully disrupt the education of students by putting them out of class and out of school</p> <p>Mr. Martez Harvey, Sophomore, Grenada High School, Grenada School District</p> <p>Ms. Ellen Reddy, Facilitator, MS Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse 2 Jailhouse</p> <p>Mr. Mike Sayer, Senior Organizer and Training Coordinator, Southern Echo, Inc.; Member, District of Columbia Bar and State of Maine Bar</p> <p>(30 minute presentation; 15 minutes for Questions from audience)</p>
12:30 pm	<b>LUNCH</b>
1:45 pm	<p>Applying our rights to ensure that students obtain the education to which they are entitled</p> <p>Small group work: (in break out rooms with small group facilitators)</p> <p>Questions for the small groups to discuss and report back upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>What</u> reasons do school personnel use to put children out of class or out of school?</li> <li>2. <u>How</u> could school personnel handle these situations differently so as to keep students in school while dealing with the issues involved?</li> <li>3. <u>Which</u> policies are needed to hold school personnel accountable to the mission of keeping students in school where they can learn, rather than putting students out of class or out of school?</li> </ol>
3:00 pm	<b>BREAK</b>
3:15 pm	Small group reports back on their answers to the 3 questions
4:30 pm	<p>Day 1 wrap-up and expectations for second day</p> <p>Dr. Marvin Haire, Interim Director of Delta Research and Cultural Institute, MVSU</p>
<b><u>AGENDA -- Day 2: Tuesday, November 13, 2007</u></b>	
9:00 am	Invocation
9:05 am	<p>Re-cap of Day 1</p> <p>Dr. Marvin Haire, Interim Director, Delta Research and Cultural Institute, MVSU</p>
9:15 am	<p>The Teacher Support Team: A deeper look at the state regulations and how to apply them “when a child begins to appear to have difficulty either academically or in terms of behavior”</p> <p>A. What are the goals of the Teacher Support Team (TST)?</p> <p>B. Who is on the TST and how are they supposed to work together?</p> <p>C. How do we make sure the TST is brought into play and that the TST does its job?</p> <p>D. Who is accountable if the TST is not brought into play or if it fails to do its job?</p> <p>E. What recourse do parents and student have if the TST does not do its job?</p> <p>F. Role of Office of Accreditation, Division of Parent Relations</p> <p>Ms. Trecina Green, Director of Curriculum Instruction, MS Dept. of Education</p> <p>(30 minute presentation; 15 minutes for Questions from audience)</p>
10:00 am	<p>“Healthy Schools”: strategies to shut down the pipeline from schoolhouse to jailhouse</p> <p><b>10:00 am</b> Changing discipline policies and practices to achieve fairness and effectiveness</p> <p>Ms. Marilyn Young, Member, Tunica County School Board; former Dir., Tunica Teens in Action; Staff Organizer, Southern Echo, Inc.</p> <p>Mr. Alfonso White, Member, Montgomery County School Board; Director, Action Communication &amp; Education Reform, Duck Hill, MS.</p> <p>(20 minute presentation; 10 minutes for Questions from audience)</p>

<b>10:30 am</b>	<b>Positive Behavior Intervention Supports and Teacher Support Team strategies</b> <b>Ms. Helen Johnson</b> , Member, Holmes County School Board <b>Ms. Betty Petty</b> , Member, Indianola School District Board of Trustees (20 minute presentation; 10 minutes for Questions from audience)
<b>11:00 am</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
<b>11:15 am</b>	<b>Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation: enabling students to learn to work together to resolve disputes</b> <b>Ms. Joyce Parker</b> , Director, Citizens for a Better Greenville <b>Mr. Leroy Johnson</b> , Exec. Dir.. Southern Echo, Inc. (20 minute presentation; 10 minutes for Questions from audience)
<b>11:45 am</b>	<b>Abolishing Corporal Punishment: outlawing paddling, beating and violence toward students</b> <b>Ms. Drustella Neely</b> , Director, Youth Innovation Movement Solutions, Tupelo, MS <b>Ms. Cherraye Oats</b> , Director, Parents and Youth United for a Better Webster County, Eupora, MS (10 minute presentation; 10 minutes for Questions from audience)
<b>12:05 pm</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>
<b>1:30 pm</b>	<b>The role of the University in the struggle to create a quality public education accessible to all students in the Mississippi Delta</b> <b>Dr. Lula Collier</b> , Dean of the College of Education, MS Valley State University <b>Dr. Marvin Haire</b> , Interim Director of Delta Research and Cultural Institute, MVSU (25 minute presentation; 15 minutes for Questions from audience)
<b>2:10 pm</b>	<b>What are the state budget challenges that we will face in 2008 and what role must community play to assist the state legislature to meet those challenges most effectively?</b>  <b>Facilitator: Mr. Mike Sayer</b> , Senior Organizer and Training Coordinator, Southern Echo, Inc. <b>Mr. Steve Williams</b> , Dir., Office of Accountability; Legislative Liaison, MS Dept. of Education <b>Rep. Bryant Clark</b> , (D - Dist. 47) Member, Education Committee <b>Ms. Judy Rhodes</b> , education consultant, Director, Office of Accountability, MDE (retired) <b>Mr. Leroy Johnson</b> , Exec. Dir., Southern Echo, Inc. <b>Additional panelist to be announced</b> (speakers: 9 minutes each, total 45 min.; Questions, Answers and Comments - 20 minutes)
<b>3:20 pm</b>	<b>Conference summary and charge/wrap-up</b> <b>Mr. Gregory Johnson and Ms. Brenda Hyde</b>
<b>3:30 pm</b>	<b>Benediction and Adjournment</b>

**\*\* About the MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable:**

**Southern Echo**, in its work on public education, partners with many grassroots community organizations across the State of Mississippi, and the southeast and southwest regions. One partnership is the **MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable**, formed in January 2005 by grassroots community organizations in the Delta region that have worked together for many years in the **MS Education Working Group**, the **MS Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse** and the **Education Stakeholders Alliance**. These non-profit organizations pool their strengths and resources across traditional race, class, political and geographic barriers to impact the formation and implementation of education policy at the state and local school district levels. Their long-term goal is to create and sustain healthy schools that will provide a quality, first-rate public education that is accessible to all students. The **Roundtable** organizations provide training and technical assistance to newer, emerging organizations and to education stakeholders within their home counties, in counties that are adjacent or nearby, and on a statewide basis.

The current members of the **Roundtable** are: **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**, **Citizens for Quality Education**, **Citizens for a Better Greenville**, **Indianola Parent Student Group**, **Action Communication and Education Reform**, **Youth Innovation Movement Solutions**, **Activists With A Purpose**, **Parents and Youth United for a Better Webster County**, **Citizens for Educational Awareness** and **Southern Echo**.



**10-15-07**



## **Dismantling the Achievement Gap**

**A Conference of Education Stakeholders  
Monday, Nov. 12 – Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2007  
at  
Mississippi Valley State University  
on  
Children At-Risk, Dropout Prevention  
and Full Funding for Public Education**



October 1, 2007

To: Parents, Students, Superintendents, Administrators, Educators, School Board Members, Public Officials and all other interested stakeholders in public education

From: Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Valley State University, and Southern Echo

Re: Participation in the Education Stakeholders Conference November 12 through 13, 2007 on  
Dismantling the Achievement Gap: Children At-Risk, Dropout Prevention and Full Funding of Education

Dear Friend of Public Education:

On behalf of the Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Valley State University and Southern Echo, we want to invite you to work together with us on November 12 through 13, 2007 at Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena. This coming together of school board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers, parent liaisons, parents and students is designed to build our understanding of the nature of the achievement gap in our public schools, the structural underpinnings of the achievement gap, and how we can work together effectively after the conference to dismantle the gap.

Enclosed is the Conference Agenda that sets out the issues that we will address at the conference. There will be presentations by leading Mississippi educators, education analysts, public officials and community-based organizations, and small group work sessions of educators, parents and students to address issues fundamental to this process. This conference will focus on school districts in the Mississippi Delta region. We will also be considering the statewide nature of the achievement gap.

The conference sponsors will cover the cost of lunch each day and provide a conference manual. We are working to obtain a conference rate for motel rooms in nearby Greenwood, but each participant will have to arrange for housing and bear the cost of housing during the conference. If you have any questions, please let us know by calling *Southern Echo* at 601-982-6400, or e-mailing your question to [souecho@bellsouth.net](mailto:souecho@bellsouth.net).

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Hank M. Bounds".

Dr. Hank Bounds, Ph.D.  
State Supt. Of Education  
MS Dept. of Education

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Roy Hudson".

Dr. Roy Hudson, Ph.D.  
Interim President  
MS Valley State University

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Leroy Johnson".

Leroy Johnson  
Executive Director  
Southern Echo, Inc.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Marvin Haire".

Dr. Marvin Haire, Ph.D.  
Interim Director  
Delta Research and Cultural Institute  
MS Valley State University



**What we mean by *Dismantling the Achievement Gap*  
a brief analysis by the Partners sponsoring the  
*Stakeholders Conference on Dismantling the Achievement Gap*  
November 12-13, 2007 at Mississippi Valley State University**

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 and low-wealth white 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, the Mississippi Department of Education estimates that the public school student dropout rate is 40 percent. State Superintendent of Education Dr. Hank Bounds believes that the most effective way to address the dropout rate is for the state to fund a quality public education framework that supports and enables all students, regardless of race or class, rural or urban, to graduate high school fully prepared for higher education or to compete effectively for the best jobs.

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, the State Department states, there are almost 500,000 children in the public schools. This means that we can expect that 4 out of every 10 children, 40 out of every 100 children, and almost 200,000 of the almost 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.

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. Data generated by the State Department of Education also shows that in the schools that the State Department of Education has identified as having *critical teacher shortages*, students have lower scores on standardized tests in the elementary and secondary schools, score lower on the college entrance exams, and have lower graduation rates.

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, 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 policy formation and implementation, are essential to create a quality public educational opportunity for the children. 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 reveals 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

standardized 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. To accomplish these changes, 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 the teacher and administrator development programs 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 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.

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.

*September 15, 2007*

*MS Department of Education*

*MS Valley State University*

*Southern Echo, Inc.*

**65 % OF MS PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS -- 293,220 OF 503,018 -- ARE CHILDREN AT-RISK.  
THEIR EDUCATION MUST NOT BE SACRIFIED ON THE ALTAR OF THE STATE BUDGET.**

**WHEN MISSISSIPPI RE-EVALUATED THE MAEP FORMULA IN 2005 THE STATE'S EXPERT CONSULTANTS  
CONCLUDED THE MAEP FORMULA SHOULD PROVIDE AN ENHANCEMENT IN THE AMOUNT OF  
114 PERCENT ABOVE BASE STUDENT COST TO MEET THE REAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN AT-RISK.  
THE CURRENT FORMULA PROVIDES ONLY A 5 PERCENT INCREASE ABOVE BASE STUDENT COST.  
IT IS UNJUST TO DENY CHILDREN AT-RISK THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION TO WHICH THEY ARE ENTITLED.**

**HOW THIS MAP WORKS:**

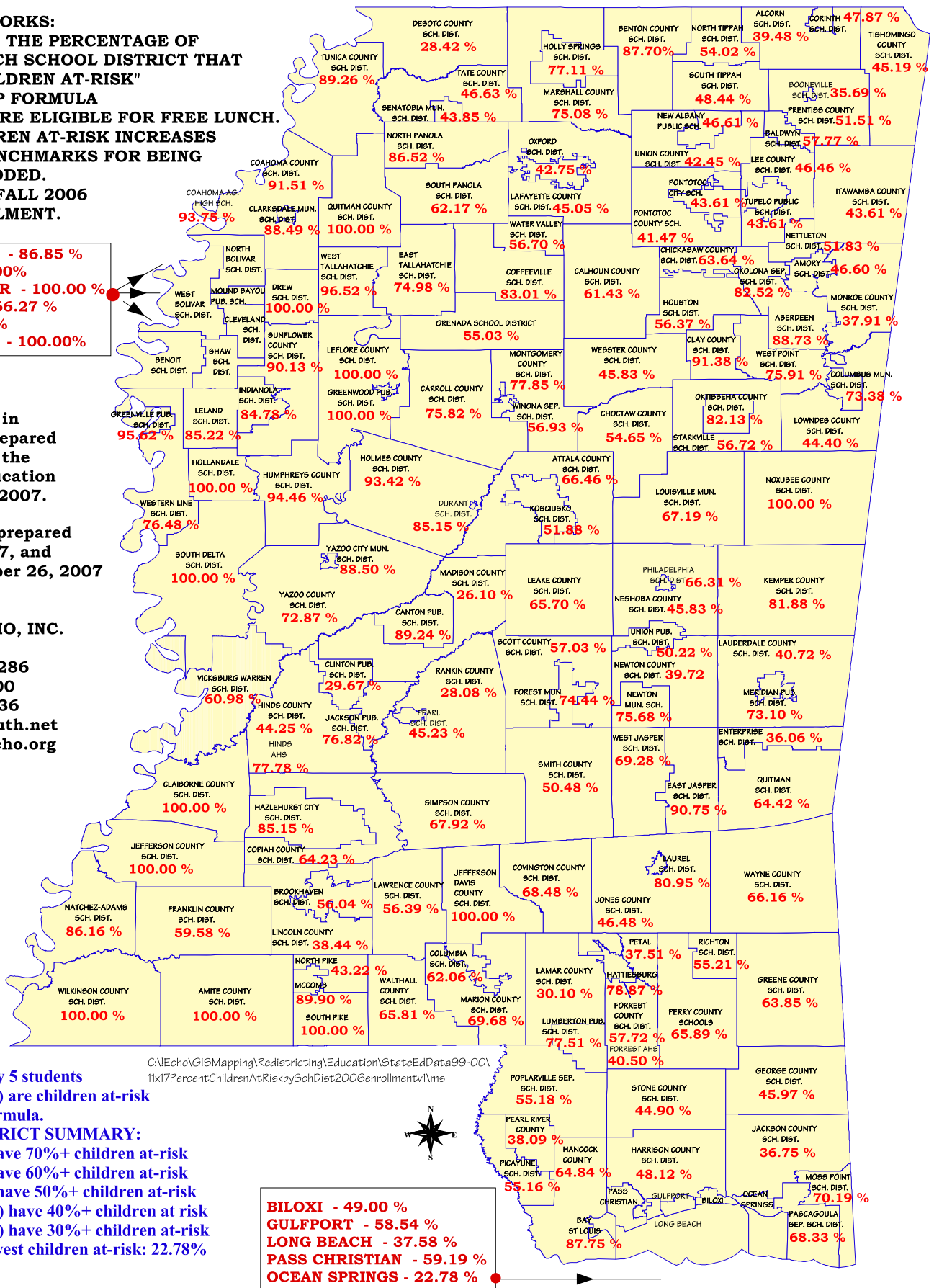
**THIS MAP SHOWS THE PERCENTAGE OF  
STUDENTS IN EACH SCHOOL DISTRICT THAT  
QUALIFY AS "CHILDREN AT-RISK"  
UNDER THE MAEP FORMULA  
BECAUSE THEY ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH.  
THE % OF CHILDREN AT-RISK INCREASES  
WHEN OTHER BENCHMARKS FOR BEING  
"AT-RISK" ARE ADDED.  
DATA BASED ON FALL 2006  
STUDENT ENROLLMENT.**

**WEST BOLIVAR - 86.85 %  
BENOIT - 100.00 %  
NORTH BOLIVAR - 100.00 %  
CLEVELAND - 66.27 %  
SHAW - 95.22 %  
MOUND BAYOU - 100.00 %**

\* The data used in  
this map was prepared  
and released by the  
MS Dept. of Education  
on January 31, 2007.

\* This map was prepared  
February 4, 2007, and  
revised September 26, 2007  
by:

**SOUTHERN ECHO, INC.  
P.O. Box 9306  
Jackson, MS 39286  
ph: 601-982-6400  
fax: 601-982-2636  
souecho@bellsouth.net  
www.southernecho.org**



**PLEASE NOTE:**

More than 3 of every 5 students  
(65% of all students) are children at-risk  
under the MAEP formula.

**MS SCHOOL DISTRICT SUMMARY:**

41% (63 districts) have 70%+ children at-risk  
56% (85 districts) have 60%+ children at-risk  
71% (108) districts have 50%+ children at-risk  
89.5% (136 districts) have 40%+ children at risk  
96.7% (147 districts) have 30%+ children at-risk  
The district with fewest children at-risk: 22.78%

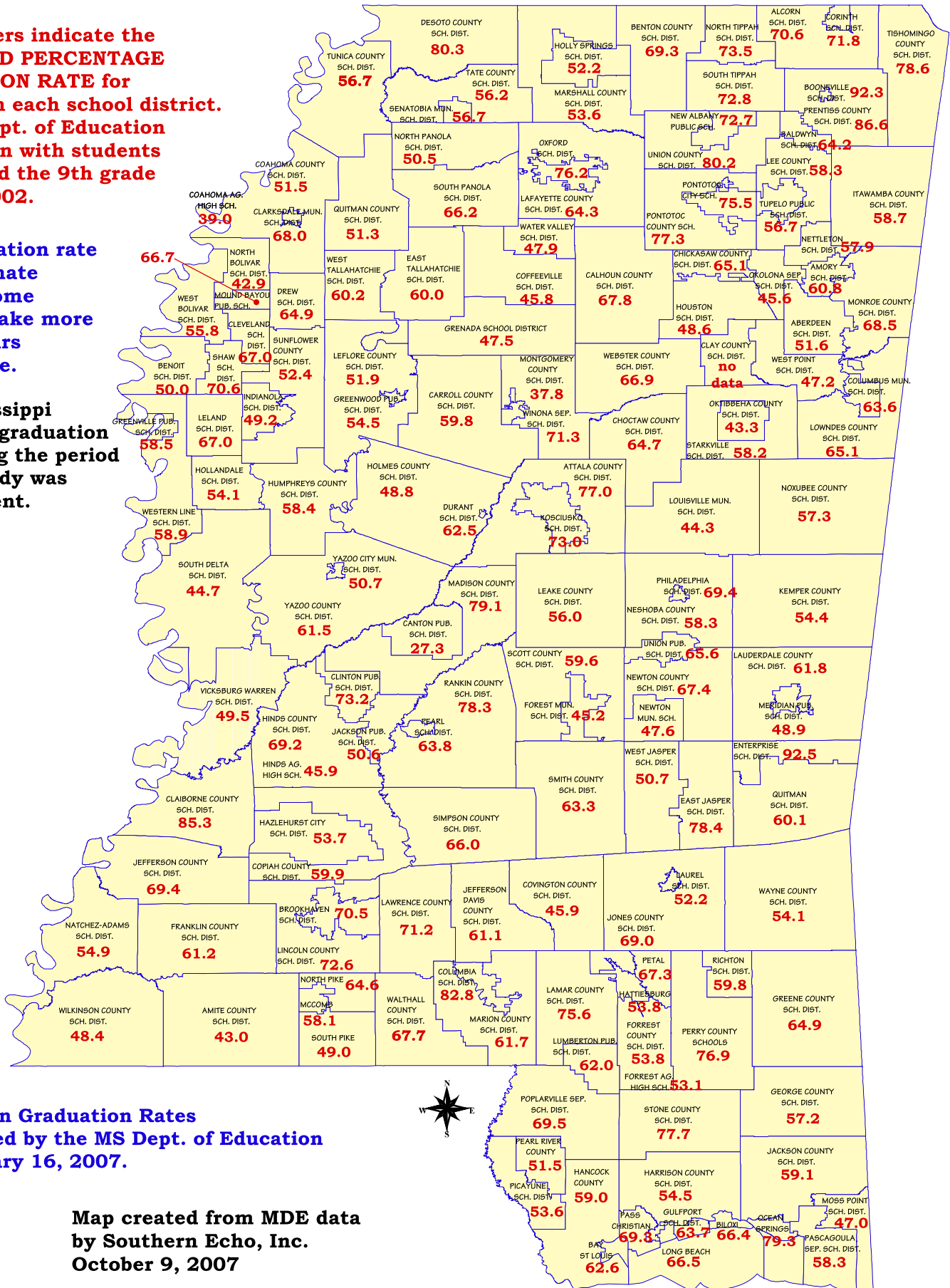
# MISSISSIPPI STUDENT GRADUATION RATE ESTIMATES

## by MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICTS based on a 4-YEAR COHORT STUDY BEGINNING 2001-2002

**Note:**  
Red numbers indicate the  
**ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE  
GRADUATION RATE** for  
students in each school district.  
The MS Dept. of Education  
study began with students  
who started the 9th grade  
in 2001-2002.

The graduation rate  
is an estimate  
because some  
students take more  
than 4 years  
to graduate.

The Mississippi  
statewide graduation  
rate during the period  
of this study was  
61.1 percent.



Data on Graduation Rates  
released by the MS Dept. of Education  
February 16, 2007.

Map created from MDE data  
by Southern Echo, Inc.  
October 9, 2007



## MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOLS --

**NOTE:**

**NOTE:**

**MDE notes that this is unofficial data tracking students who were 9th graders in 2001-02.**



## Data on Graduation and Dropout Rates by School District prepared and released

**Map created from MDE data  
by Southern Echo, Inc.  
October 10, 2007**

STATE DROPOUT AND GRADUATION RATES

The Mississippi Department of Education has begun calculating dropout rates and graduation rates using a computer tracking system for individual students. This is unofficial data using students who were ninth-graders in 2001-02. Completers are students who received a diploma, GED certificate or special education certificate. Graduates received a diploma. Percentages do not add to 100 because some students take more than four years to finish.

	Dropout percentage	Completer percentage	Graduation percentage		Dropout percentage	Completer percentage	Graduation percentage
Aberdeen	32.5	59.6	51.6	Louisville	44.9	47.3	44.3
Alcorn	18.6	79.4	70.6	Lowndes County	24.0	71.7	65.1
Amite County	43.0	46.4	43.0	Lumberton	28.2	67.6	62.0
Amory	28.4	67.5	60.8	Madison County	15.0	82.5	79.1
Attala County	17.0	78.2	77.0	Marion County	19.0	67.8	61.7
Baldwyn	25.6	72.8	64.2	Marshall County	34.2	57.3	53.6
Bay St. Louis	24.3	67.1	62.6	McComb	30.3	65.8	58.1
Benoit	17.4	55.0	50.0	Meridian	36.4	54.3	48.9
Benton County	22.2	72.8	69.3	Monroe County	21.9	76.1	68.5
Biloxi	17.8	77.5	66.4	Montgomery Co.	48.0	44.4	37.8
Booneville	6.5	92.3	92.3	Moss Point	38.0	52.5	47.0
Brookhaven	16.6	75.5	70.5	Mound Bayou	21.7	73.9	66.7
Calhoun County	17.8	76.2	67.8	Natchez-Adams	32.4	59.6	54.9
Canton	61.7	29.1	27.3	Neshoba County	29.4	65.1	58.3
Carroll County	31.1	65.8	59.8	Nettleton	20.6	76.6	57.9
Chickasaw County	11.1	79.1	65.1	New Albany	15.9	80.3	72.7
Choctaw County	31.4	66.9	64.7	Newton	39.8	50.0	47.6
Claiborne County	8.0	88.2	85.3	Newton County	23.4	73.0	67.4
Clarksdale	20.1	75.0	68.0	North Bolivar	33.0	62.2	42.9
Cleveland	24.3	69.1	67.0	North Panola	38.8	55.4	50.5
Clinton	23.9	74.2	73.2	North Pike	29.7	67.7	64.6
Coahoma AHS	45.6	44.9	39.0	North Tippah	14.6	82.4	73.5
Coahoma County	37.1	52.5	51.5	Noxubee County	34.4	60.8	57.3
Coffeeville	31.3	62.7	45.8	Ocean Springs	13.3	81.5	79.3
Columbia	4.3	91.4	82.8	Okolona	45.1	47.8	45.6
Columbus	26.3	66.2	63.6	Oktibbeha Co.	32.7	57.7	43.3
Copiah County	28.8	67.3	59.9	Oxford	18.8	78.6	76.2
Corinth	23.5	76.5	71.8	Pascagoula	29.6	64.9	58.3
Covington County	12.8	81.4	66.8	Pass Christian	5.7	79.3	69.3
DeSoto County	12.5	82.5	80.3	Pearl	30.6	66.6	63.8
Drew	24.7	68.9	64.9	Pearl River	26.9	70.5	51.5
Durant	18.8	68.8	62.5	Perry County	7.6	89.0	76.9
East Jasper	4.5	87.5	78.4	Petal	26.5	69.2	67.3
East Tallahatchie	31.7	65.6	60.0	Philadelphia	25.6	74.1	69.4
Enterprise	3.6	96.2	92.5	Picayune	30.6	64.7	53.6
Forest City	40.5	56.5	45.2	Pontotoc	15.1	82.1	75.5
Forrest AHS	30.3	58.0	53.1	Pontotoc County	5.9	91.9	77.3
Forrest County	27.7	70.8	64.6	Poplarville	20.5	74.8	69.5
Franklin County	12.1	84.2	61.2	Prentiss County	11.4	87.2	86.6
George County	32.1	62.4	57.2	Quitman	25.7	67.4	60.1
Greene County	26.3	73.1	64.9	Quitman County	26.1	67.8	51.3
Greenville	25.2	65.0	58.5	Rankin County	17.3	79.7	78.3
Greenwood	35.2	55.6	54.5	Richton	32.9	62.2	59.8
Grenada	35.7	55.8	47.5	Scott County	29.7	67.1	59.6
Gulfport	22.2	71.1	63.7	Senatobia	12.7	84.5	81.7
Hancock County	24.9	66.2	59.0	Shaw	16.2	79.4	70.6
Harrison County	28.4	63.9	54.5	Simpson County	21.9	72.7	66.0
Hattiesburg	30.0	59.1	53.8	Smith County	22.5	72.3	63.3
Hazlehurst	34.1	58.2	53.7	South Delta	39.8	48.0	44.7
Hinds AHS	43.9	48.0	45.9	South Panola	18.8	76.1	66.2
Hinds County	20.5	74.6	69.2	South Pike	39.1	53.5	49.0
Hollandale	41.9	56.8	54.1	South Tippah	21.6	76.1	72.8
Holly Springs	29.9	54.9	52.2	Starkville	36.1	59.4	58.2
Holmes County	22.0	55.8	48.8	Stone County	14.8	82.1	77.7
Houston	40.6	56.6	48.6	Sunflower County	34.5	61.9	52.4
Humphreys Count	27.0	65.3	58.4	Tate County	26.6	64.5	56.2
Indianola	33.3	56.2	49.2	Tishomingo Co.	13.8	86.1	78.6
Itawamba County	34.8	60.7	58.7	Tunica County	31.7	60.6	56.7
Jackson County	32.0	62.1	59.1	Tupelo	27.9	67.0	56.7
Jackson	32.4	55.6	50.6	Union	23.4	71.9	65.6
Jeff.Davis Co.	29.0	65.7	61.1	Union County	8.7	91.3	80.2
Jefferson Co.	18.5	73.4	69.4	Vicksburg Warren	37.9	52.7	49.5
Jones County	25.1	71.3	69.0	Walthall Co.	15.3	75.8	67.7
Kemper County	26.4	58.9	54.4	Water Valley	32.0	62.8	47.9
Kosciusko	8.1	87.8	73.0	Wayne County	29.9	64.4	54.1
Lafayette Co.	16.0	78.7	64.3	Webster County	20.5	78.3	66.9
Lamar County	19.4	77.3	75.6	West Bolivar	30.8	60.2	55.8
Lauderdale Co.	26.1	68.5	61.8	West Jasper	31.0	64.1	50.7
Laurel	25.6	70.2	52.2	West Point	41.8	50.7	47.2
Lawrence Co.	21.2	73.6	71.2	West Tallahatchie	22.3	66.0	60.2
Leake County	34.3	58.2	56.0	Western Line	32.1	60.4	58.9
Lee County	26.5	66.4	58.3	Wilkinson Co.	31.4	56.7	48.4
Leflore County	36.6	55.4	51.9	Winona	19.3	71.3	71.3
Leland	22.5	72.7	67.0	Yazoo City	38.2	55.6	50.7
Lincoln County	23.6	74.0	72.6	Yazoo County	29.3	66.3	61.5
Long Beach	23.2	70.8	66.5	State	26.6	67.0	61.1

STATE DROPOUT RATE

This is unofficial data tracking students who were ninth-graders in 2001-02. Completers are students who received a diploma, GED certificate or special education certificate. Graduates received a diploma. Percentages do not add to 100 because some students take more than four years to finish.

These districts have the best graduation rates in the state.

District	Dropout percentage	Completer percentage	Graduation percentage
Enterprise	3.6	96.2	92.5
Booneville	6.5	92.3	92.3
Prentiss County	11.4	87.2	86.6
Claiborne County	8.0	88.2	85.3
Columbia	4.3	91.4	82.8
Senatobia	12.7	84.5	81.7
DeSoto County	12.5	82.5	80.3
Union County	8.7	91.3	80.2
Ocean Springs	13.3	81.5	79.3
Madison County	15.0	82.5	79.1
Tishomingo Co.	13.8	86.1	78.6
East Jasper	4.5	87.5	78.4
Rankin County	17.3	79.7	78.3
Stone County	14.8	82.1	77.7
Pontotoc County	5.9	91.9	77.3
Attala County	17.0	78.2	77.0
Perry County	7.6	89.0	76.9
Oxford	18.8	78.6	76.2
Lamar County	19.4	77.3	75.6
State	26.6	67.0	61.1

HIGHEST DROPOUT RATE

This is unofficial data tracking students who were ninth-graders in 2001-02. Completers are students who received a diploma, GED certificate or special education certificate. Graduates received a diploma. Percentages do not add to 100 because some students take more than four years to finish.

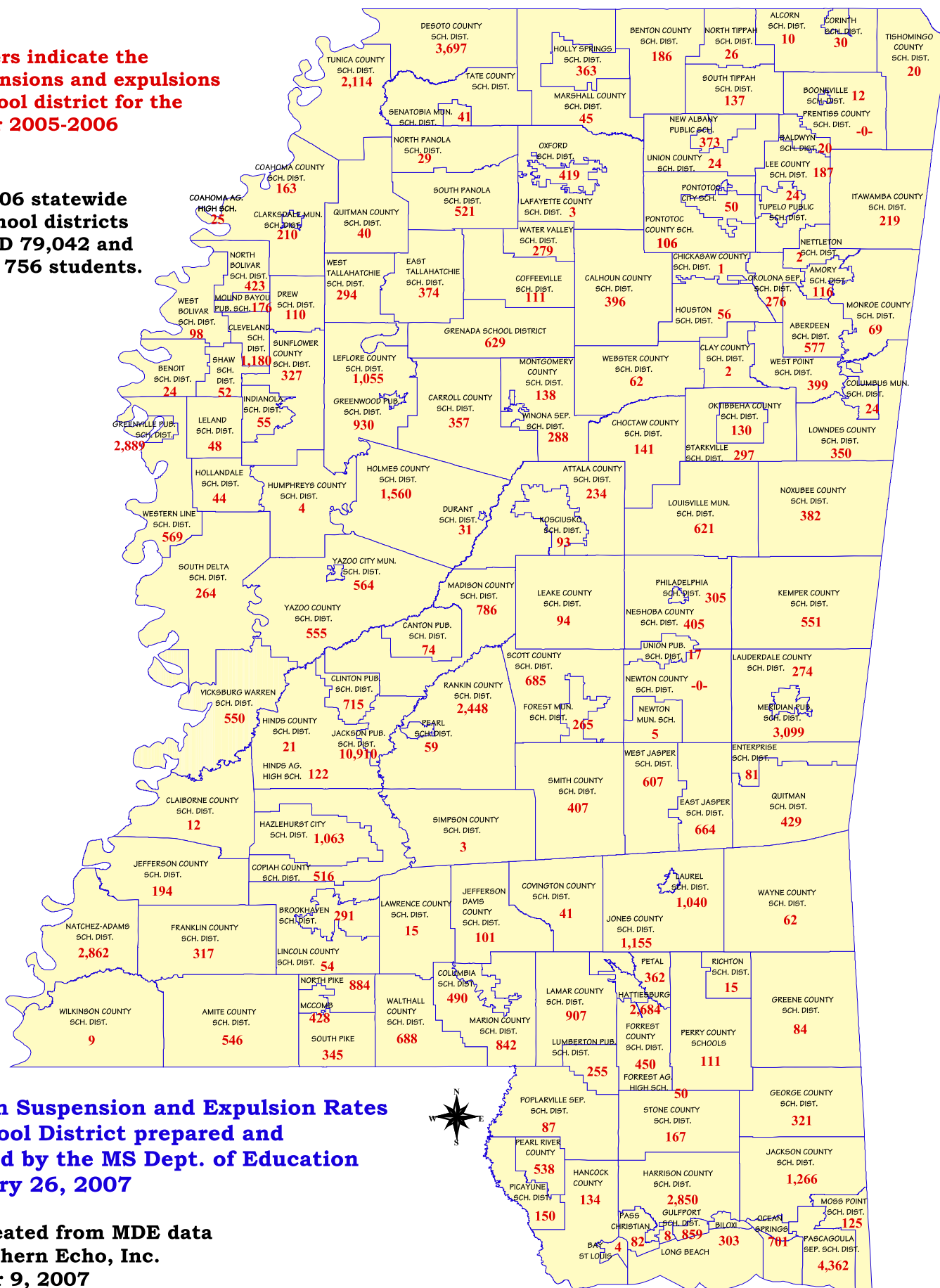
These districts have the highest dropout rates in the state.

District	Dropout percentage	Completer percentage	Graduation percentage
Canton	61.7	29.1	27.3
Montgomery Co.	48.0	44.4	37.8
Coahoma AHS	45.6	44.9	39.0
Okolona	45.1	47.8	45.6
Louisville	44.9	47.3	44.3
Hinds AHS	43.9	48.0	45.9
Amite County	43.0	46.4	43.0
Hollandale	41.9	56.8	54.1
West Point	41.8	50.7	47.2
Houston	40.6	56.6	48.6
Forest	40.5	56.5	45.2
Newton	39.8	50.0	47.6
South Delta	39.8	48.0	44.7
South Pike	39.1	53.5	49.0
North Panola	38.8	55.4	50.5
Yazoo City	38.2	55.6	50.7
Moss Point	38.0	52.5	47.0
Vicksburg Warren	37.9	52.7	49.5
Coahoma County	37.1	52.5	51.5
Leflore County	36.6	55.4	51.9
State	26.6	67.0	61.1

**2005 - 2006 SUSPENSION and EXPULSION TOTALS  
by MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

**Note:  
Red numbers indicate the  
total suspensions and expulsions  
for the school district for the  
school year 2005-2006**

**Also Note:**  
In 2005-2006 statewide  
the 152 school districts  
**SUSPENDED 79,042 and**  
**EXPELLED 756 students.**



**Data on Suspension and Expulsion Rates  
by School District prepared and  
released by the MS Dept. of Education  
February 26, 2007**

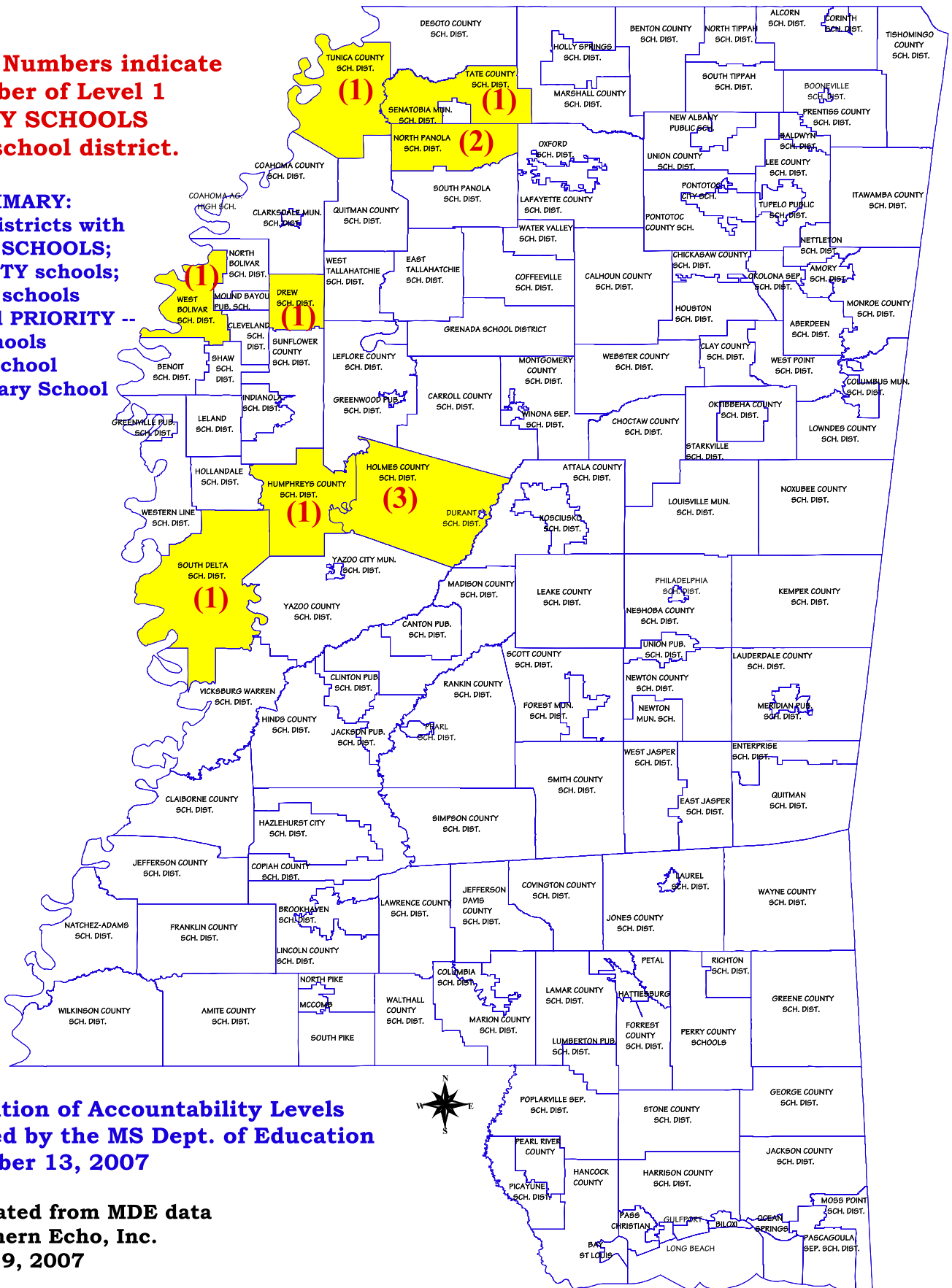
**Map created from MDE data  
by Southern Echo, Inc.  
October 9, 2007**

# MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL DISTRICTS -- 2007

## School Districts with Level 1 Priority Schools (highlighted in yellow)

**Note:**  
The Red Numbers indicate  
the number of Level 1  
PRIORITY SCHOOLS  
in each school district.

**DATA SUMMARY:**  
8 school districts with  
PRIORITY SCHOOLS;  
11 PRIORITY schools;  
Of the 11 schools  
designated PRIORITY --  
9 High Schools  
1 Middle School  
1 Elementary School



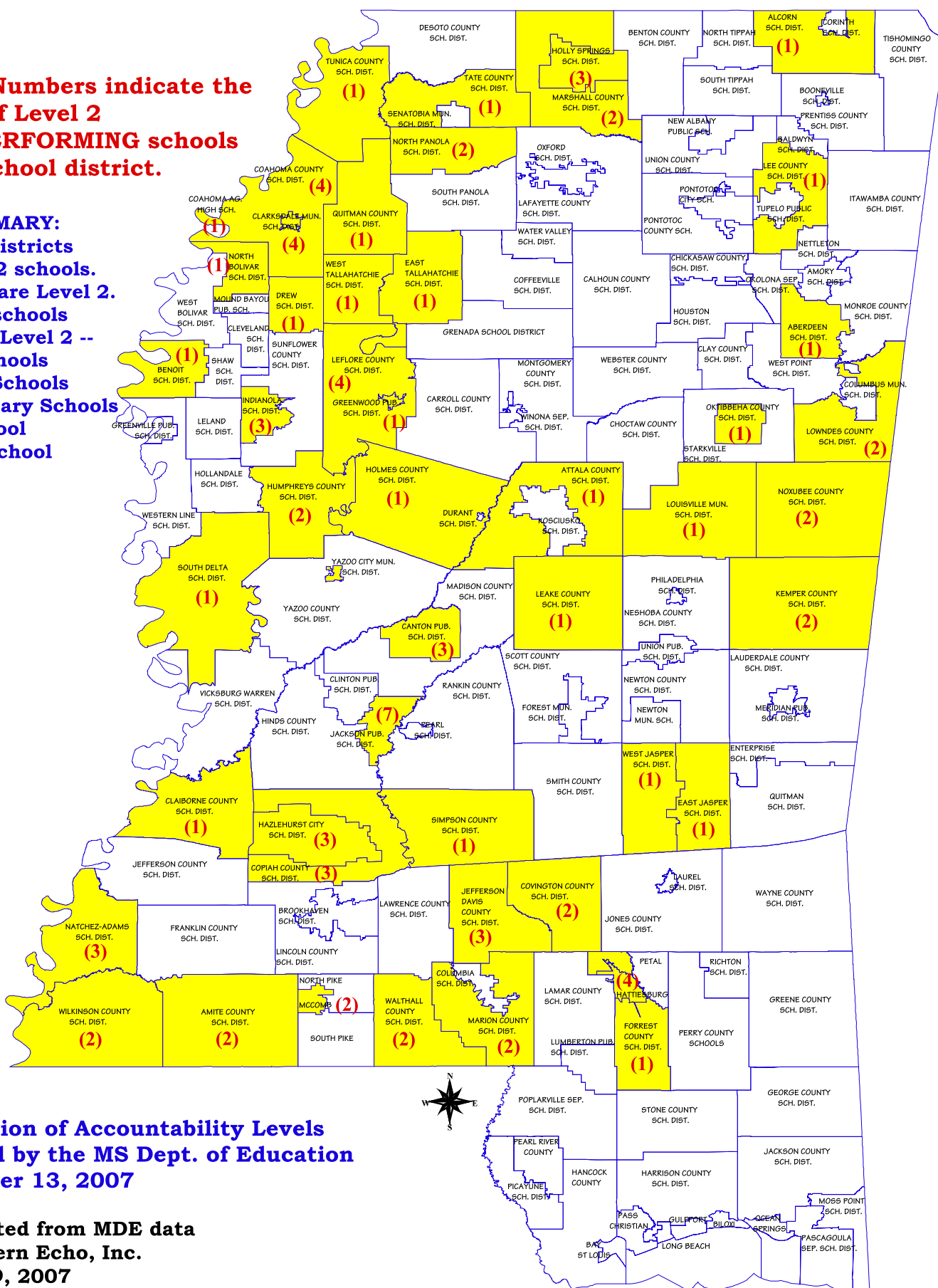
**Designation of Accountability Levels**  
approved by the MS Dept. of Education  
September 13, 2007

Map created from MDE data  
by Southern Echo, Inc.  
October 9, 2007



**School Districts with Level 2 UNDERPERFORMING Schools  
(highlighted in yellow)**

**DATA SUMMARY:**  
**49 school districts**  
**with Level 2 schools.**  
**94 schools are Level 2.**  
**Of the 94 schools**  
**designated Level 2 --**  
**33 High Schools**  
**21 Middle Schools**  
**38 Elementary Schools**  
**1 K-12 School**  
**1 Magnet School**



**Designation of Accountability Levels  
approved by the MS Dept. of Education  
September 13, 2007**

**Map created from MDE data  
by Southern Echo, Inc.  
October 9, 2007**

# U.S.: Corporal Punishment and Paddling Statistics by State and Race

## States Banning Corporal Punishment



State	Year Present Statute
Alaska	1989 AK Statutes Section 04AAC 07.010
California	1986 CA Education Code Section 49000-49001
Connecticut	1989 CT Penal Code Sec. 53a-18
Delaware	2003 DE Education Code Sec. 702
Hawaii	1973 HI Rev. Statutes Sec. 302A-1141
Illinois	1993 IL Compiled Statutes, School Code Sec. 5/24-24
Iowa	1989 IA School Code Sec. 280.21
Maine	1975 ME Criminal Code Sec. 106
Maryland	1993 MD Code Education Sec. 7-306
Massachusetts	1971 MA General Laws , Education Sec. 37G
Michigan	1989 MI Compiled Laws, Rev. School Code Sec. 380.1312
Minnesota	1989 MN Statutes Sec. 121A.58
Montana	1991 MT Code Annotated Sec. 20-4-302
Nebraska	1988 NE Rev. Statutes Sec. 79-295
Nevada	1993 NV Rev. Statutes Sec 392.4633
New Hampshire	1983 NH Rev. Statutes Ann. Sec. 627:6
New Jersey	1867 NJ Permanent Statutes, Education 18A:6-1
New York	1985 NY Regulations of the Board of Regents, 8 NYCRR 19.5
North Dakota	1989 ND Century Code, Elem. and Sec. Education Sec. 15.1-

19-02

Oregon	1989 OR Rev. Statutes Sec. 339.250
Pennsylvania	2005 22 PA Code CHS. 7 and 12, Sec. 12.5
Rhode Island	1977 Wolfweseder v. Woonsocket, Commissioner of Education
South Dakota	1990 SD Codified Laws, Sec. 13-32-2
Utah	1992 UT Administrative Rule R277-608
Vermont	1985 VT Statutes, Education Sec. 1161a
Virginia	1989 VA Code, Education Sec. 22.1-279.1
Washington	1993 WA Administrative Code 180-40-235
West Virginia	1994 WV Code Sec. 18A-5-1 (e)
Wisconsin	1988 WI Statute Sec. 118.31

#### **STATES WITH LIMITED BANS:**

<b>State</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Present Statute</b>
--------------	-------------	------------------------

Ohio	1994	ORC 3319.41 (A) (B) (D) Corporal punishment is banned unless a school board follows several procedures before voting to allow corporal punishment. Parents in districts which allow it may refuse to have their children paddled.
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\*Dates listed are when the law was enacted, unless otherwise noted.

Some states banned corporal punishment by law and some by regulation. Some states banned corporal punishment by removing permission for its use. Contact [info@stophitting.org](mailto:info@stophitting.org) for specific information.

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## **Corporal Punishment in U.S. Public Schools 2004-2005 School Year: data released May, 2007**

In the 2004-2005 school year, 272,028 school children in the U.S. were subjected to physical punishment. This is a significant drop of almost 10%, continuing a steady trend from the early 1980's.

<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Students Hit</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Students</b>
Alabama	36,130	4.85
Arkansas	36,957	7.25

Arizona	1,583	0.16
Colorado	1	<.01
Florida	9,711	0.38
Georgia	19,826	1.29
Idaho	332	0.13
Indiana	2,737	0.26
Kansas	106	0.02
Kentucky	2,825	0.43
Louisiana	14,165	1.95
Missouri	4,371	0.48
Mississippi	40,692	8.01
North Carolina	2,718	0.19
New Mexico	722	0.21
Ohio	80	<.01
Oklahoma	12,715	2.04
Pennsylvania	6	<.01
South Carolina	2,509	0.36
Tennessee	33,353	3.38
Texas	50,489	1.17
Wyoming	1	<.01

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**The 10 worst states, by percentage of students struck by educators in the 2002-2003 school year:**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Mississippi	8.0
2	Arkansas	7.3
3	Alabama	4.9
4	Tennessee	3.4

5	Oklahoma	2.0
6	Louisiana	2.0
7	Georgia	1.3
8	Texas	1.2
9	Missouri	0.5
10	Kentucky	0.4

Notes:

1. African-American students comprise 17% of all public school students in the U.S., but are 38% of those who have corporal punishment inflicted on them, more than twice the rate of white students.
2. One third of all the cases of corporal punishment occur in just two states: Texas and Mississippi, and if we add Arkansas, Alabama and Tennessee, these five states account for almost three quarters of all the nation's school paddlings.

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#### Number of Students Struck Each Year in U.S. Public Schools

YEAR	# WHITE	%	# BLACK	%	TOT. KIDS HIT	%
1976	992,675	65	447,314	29	1,521,896	3.5
1978	940,467	65	411,271	29	1,438,317	3.4
1980	901,032	64	403,386	29	1,408,303	3.4
1982	no statistical projection was made this year					
1984	852,427	64	374,315	28	1,332,317	3.3
1986	659,224	60	345,411	31	1,099,731	2.7
1988	549,572	61	255,296	28	898,370	2.2
1990	346,488	56	208,543	34	613,760	1.5
1992	295,050	53	215,684	39	555,531	1.3
1994	256,363	54	182,394	39	470,683	1.1
1997	241,406	53	178,114	39	457,754	1.0
1998	199,572	55	135,523	37	365,058	0.8



2000	181,689	53	132,065	39	342,038	0.7
2003	159,446	53	115,819	38	301,016	0.6
2004	143,002	53	104,627	38	272,028	0.57

## About the Study:

The above data and more can be found at the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights website on this page:


<http://vistademo.beyond2020.com/ocr2004rv30/xls/2004Projected.html>

The above state and national totals are statistical projections. Within each state you may find the data reported by your local school district, if it was one of the 6,000 districts asked for hard data. If your district is not listed, it was not surveyed or failed to report survey data.

Here is how to look up specific school districts on the Department of Education website:

## Process for looking up Office for Civil Rights corporal punishment stats for school districts:

Here's how to find corporal punishment data for schools districts (from the year 2004). Data is not available for every school district in a state as the study uses sampling data:

1. Begin at the Office for Civil Rights:  
<http://vistademo.beyond2020.com/ocr2004rv30/wdsdata.html>
2. Click on "View the Data"
3. Choose the first table (07A/08A) "Student enrollment..."
4. To choose data for a state, scroll down the list and choose which state you are interested in. To choose a specific school or district, click on the plus sign next to the state and check the box with the school you would like.
5. Once you have made your selection, click on "Data Categories" from the "Select Dimensions" menu. Make your selection from the available data types.
6. Continue down the "Select Dimensions" menu, adding whatever information you would like to see on the report, i.e. race/ethnicity, gender, etc.
7. When you have finished selecting from all available data, click on the  icon in the top left corner.

Compiled By:

**Center for Effective Discipline**  
155 W. Main Street, Suite 1603  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

tel: (614)221-8829

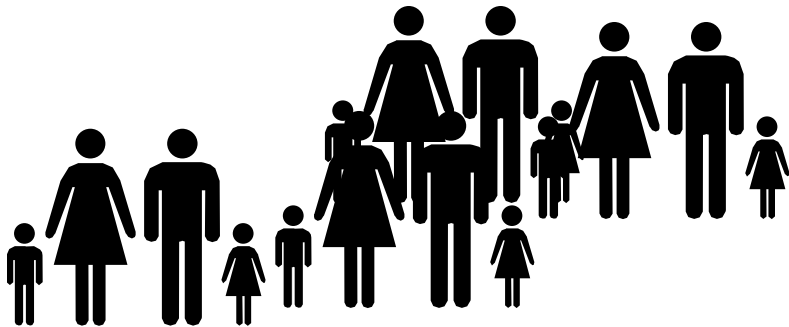
[www.stophitting.com](http://www.stophitting.com)

# **Building Healthy Schools and Quality Education in Mississippi for All Students**

**through Full Funding of a  
Coordinated Inter-Disciplinary Strategy**

**Brown Paper #2**  
by the  
***Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable***

**Submitted to the Mississippi Legislative  
Task Force on Children At-Risk**



**Prepared by:**

**Action Communication & Education Reform  
(Montgomery County)**

**Activists With A Purpose (Grenada County)**

**Citizens for a Better Greenville (Washington County)**

**Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**

**Citizens for Educational Awareness**

**(Montgomery County)**

**Indianola Parent Student Group (Sunflower County)**

**Nollie's Citizens for Quality Education (Holmes County)**

**Parents and Youth United for a Better Webster County**

**Southern Echo (statewide)**

**Youth Innovation Movement Solutions (Lee County)**

**September 14, 2007**

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- I. Introduction – the nature and dimensions of the dilemma
- II. Importance of including the *expertise* of parents and students into the policy formation process regarding graduation and dropout rates -- 2 kinds of *expertise: qualitative data and quantitative data*
- III. Including all the necessary spokes when building a wheel, or using all of the pieces to complete a puzzle – i.e. maximizing strategic impact through program coordination
- IV. Some of the existing strategies that are the spokes of the wheel or the pieces of the puzzle that need to be included in the MS Dept. of Education Dropout Prevention Plan



## Some Brass Tacks

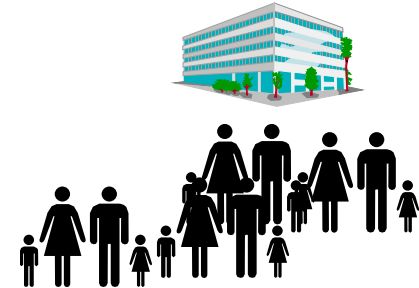
- The **current base student cost** in the MS Adequate Education Program formula for fiscal year 2008 (7-1-07 to 6-30-08) is **\$4,574.00**.
- The **current enhancement** for students at-risk in the MAEP formula is **5 %**.  
**5 %** of \$4,574 = **\$228.70**. This means that under the MAEP formula local school districts receive from the State of Mississippi only **\$228.70** for each student that qualifies as a student at-risk. This does not begin to meet the need!
- In 2005 the Augenblick study determined that in order to meet the education needs of **students at-risk** in Mississippi the enhancement above base student cost per student ought to be **114 %**. The State of Mississippi commissioned this study.  
**114 %** of \$4,574 = **\$5,214.36**. Therefore, each school district should receive **\$5,214.36** above base student cost to meet the needs of each student at-risk.

COMPARE the difference between what is needed and what we do:

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>\$4,574</b> – base student cost      | <b>\$4,574.00</b> – base student cost |
| + <b>\$5,214.36</b> – 114 % enhancement | <b>\$ 228.70</b> – 5 % enhancement    |
| = <b>\$9,788.36</b>                     | <b>\$4,802.70</b>                     |
- NOTE: **Rankin County School District** stated it actually cost **\$10,393.00** in the 06-07 school year to educate **students at-risk**. “*Unleashing Possibilities for All Students*”, page 7, Report to the MS Legislative Task Force on Children At-Risk, August 17, 2007, by Rankin County School Superintendent Lynn Weathersby. **In Rankin County, therefore, the cost to educate each at-risk student is \$5,819 above base student cost, which is 122 % above base student cost.**
- THEREFORE, the State is **under-funding** the needs of each student at-risk by approximately **\$4,985.66** under the *Augenblick* projected analysis and by **\$5,590.30** under the *Rankin County School District* actual experience!



## 1. Introduction



### **Mississippi High School Graduation Rates** **– Class of 2005-2006**

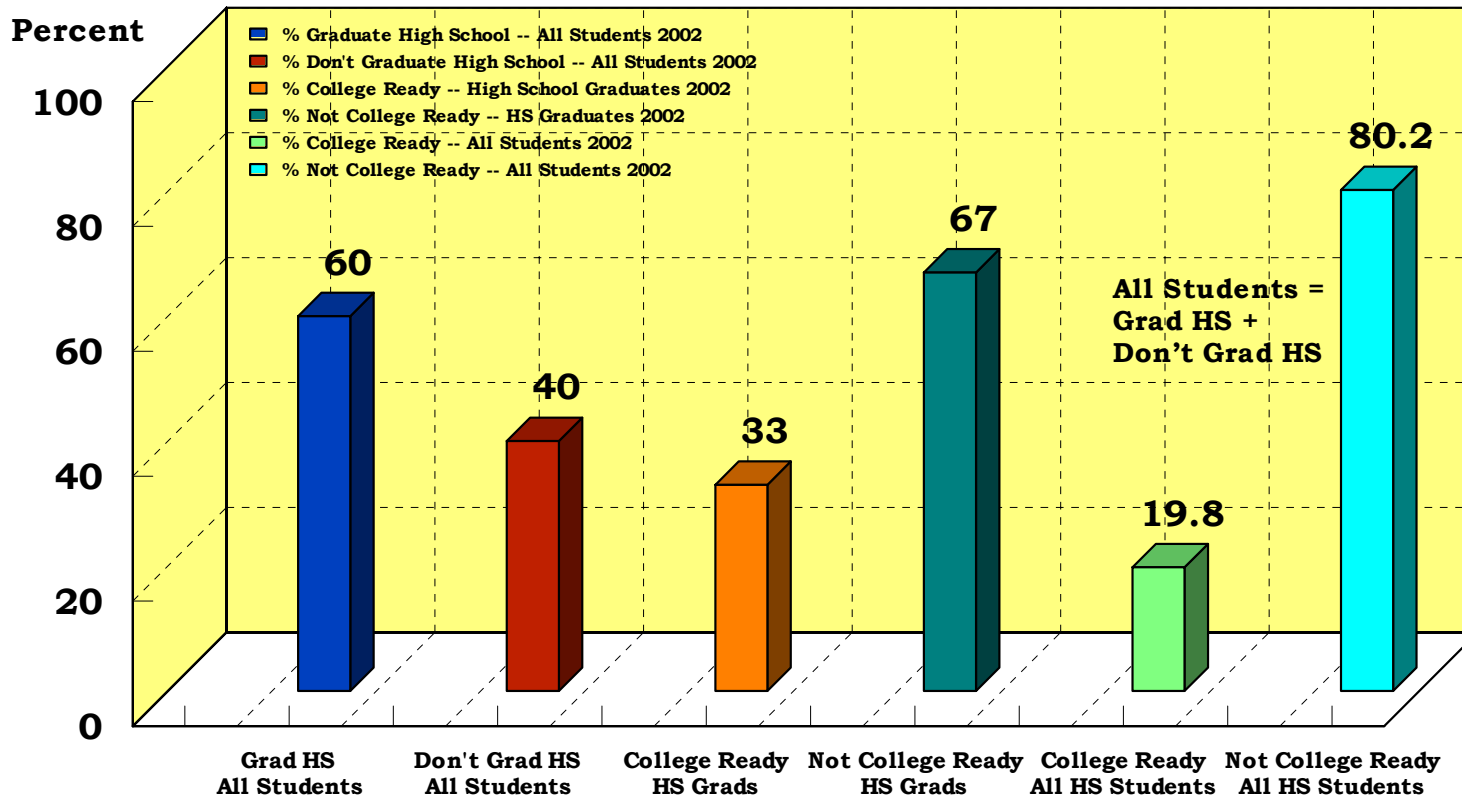
- **Only 61 % of Mississippi public school students graduated high school on time, according to the latest data provided by the MS Dept. of Education.**
- **Therefore, 39 % of all Mississippi public school students did NOT graduate high school on time.**
- **In 2005-2006 there were approximately 494,000 students in Mississippi public schools, grades K-12. If student outcomes do not improve, at current graduation rates we can anticipate that approximately 192,660 of the more than 494,000 students will not graduate high school on time.**

## **Mississippi “College Readiness” Rates – Class of 2005-2006**

- Only 33 %, or 1/3, of Mississippi public school students graduate high school “college ready”: that is, effectively prepared to undertake the minimum requirements of a 4-year college or university.
  - Therefore, 67 %, or 2/3rds, of Mississippi public school students that graduate high school are NOT “college ready”.
- Each year more than 494,000 students attend Mississippi public schools. If we do not increase the 61% graduation rate, we can anticipate that only approximately 301,340 of those 494,000 students WILL graduate high school on time.
  - By the same token, at current graduation rates we can also anticipate that approximately 192,660 of those students now attending grades K through 12 WILL NOT graduate high school on time.
  - At the same time, since only 33 % of Mississippi students graduate “college ready”, we can anticipate that if student outcomes do not improve that approximately 198,200, or 67 %, of the 295,800 students that will eventually graduate high school will NOT be sufficiently prepared to undertake the minimum requirements of a 4-year college or university.
- So – if we combine those who will not graduate high school on time with those who graduate “not college ready”, then we can anticipate that approximately 390,860 of the more than 494,000 students now attending K-12 in Mississippi public schools eventually will leave the school system NOT “college ready”. Conversely, only approximately 103,140 of the 494,000 public school students now in K-12 WILL graduate “college ready”.

**Chart #3**  
**Mississippi High Schools**  
**-- Class of 2002 --**  
**High School Graduation**  
**and**  
**College Readiness Rates**

If student outcomes do not improve, this data suggests that if those who do NOT graduate are combined with those who graduate NOT college ready, the percentage of all students NOT college ready will be 80.2 percent, or 395,386 of the roughly 493,000 students currently in the public school system.



The data in the text and charts on pages 3-5 herein have been derived from the study entitled: Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates: 1991-2002, Education Working Paper #8, by Jay P. Greene, Ph.D. and Marcus A. Winters, Published February 2005 by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Charts prepared March 2006 by Southern Echo, Inc., Jackson, MS.

## **Consequences for Mississippi's children and families, and for the general welfare of the community**

- **Children that do not graduate high school have very poor employment prospects in our evolving economy.**
- **Persons with a 4-year college degree, according to the data:**
  - 1. earn substantially more income than a person without one, or a person with a 2-year degree from a community or junior college;**
  - 2. are better prepared financially to support a family,**
  - 3. are more engaged in the civic, cultural and social life of the community;**
  - 4. pay more taxes to support public education and other necessary government functions, and**
  - 5. are much less likely to need government assistance programs.**
- **Children that do not graduate high school often wind up on the streets unemployed, without financial resources to sustain themselves or a family, few meaningful programs to assist them, and are at significantly greater risk of winding up in either the juvenile or adult justice system.**

## **Consequences for Mississippi's children and families, and for the general welfare of the community, *continued***

- **This is a prescription for our children “getting into trouble” rather than becoming productive, engaged citizens. It costs between 7 and 10 times more to incarcerate a young person than to educate a young person. Education is the best path to safer communities.**
- **Under-education of our children is also a prescription for maintaining some of the highest poverty, poorest health, and lowest birth weight rates in the nation. Persons with less education and less wealth are less likely to take advantage of medical services, cannot afford necessary medical services or medication, and have higher incidence of disease and lower life expectancy.**
- **In our evolving 21st century economy, low graduation rates, low college-readiness rates, and a poorly trained workforce without the skills needed in our evolving economy makes Mississippi less competitive for the attraction of investment capital and new job opportunities to Mississippi.**
- **Low graduation rates and poor preparation for college in Mississippi makes it exceedingly difficult to develop a new pool of students who become qualified first-rate accountable home-grown teachers and administrators to replace our teachers and administrators (who cannot be expected to go on forever) that retire or otherwise leave Mississippi school systems. It also means a smaller pool of students that can become scientists, engineers, mathematicians, medical professionals, researchers and specialists, entrepreneurs, craftsmen, tradesmen, public officials, and accountable and effective community leaders.**

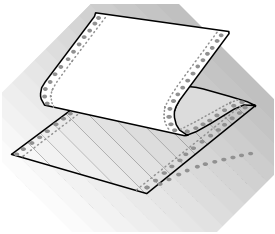
## THE PLAGUE OF PERSISTENT POVERTY

- 2007 Census figures released in August 2007 showed a slight decline in the national poverty rate.
- In Mississippi, however, the rate is up from 19.9 percent in 1999 to the current 21.1 percent.
- The Mississippi Center for Economic Policy released a report in April 2007 that showed that nearly 130,000, or **39 percent**, of Mississippi's working families are **low-income**. The report also said **35 percent** of the state's jobs are **low-wage** occupations.

Source: Clarion Ledger, September 2, 2007

## 2. Importance of including the *expertise* of parents and students in policy formation and implementation

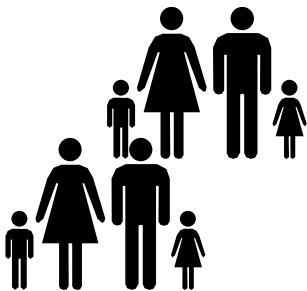
- There are two kinds of data that are used to inform the development of public policy: quantitative data and qualitative data.



- **Quantitative data** uses the aggregate of statistical data to assess the impact of public policies, or the lack of them, on different segments of the population. In this way we can evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of the conscious policy choices made by those with the apparent authority to make them.



- **Qualitative data** uses the narrative stories of individuals, such as parents, students and educators, to illuminate experiences that are representative of whole segments of the population. The learnings from this process provide insights that cannot be captured in statistical data. Unfortunately, qualitative data provided by parents and students is often under-valued as a result of deep-seated biases within the culture.



- Many **grassroots community organizations** are comprised of **parents and students** who are working to create a quality public education accessible to all children.
- Grassroots organizations have become skillful at using both quantitative and qualitative data to develop public policy recommendations to dismantle the achievement gap, transform the culture of public education, and to bring together parents, students, educators, business leaders and public officials to work together in this process.



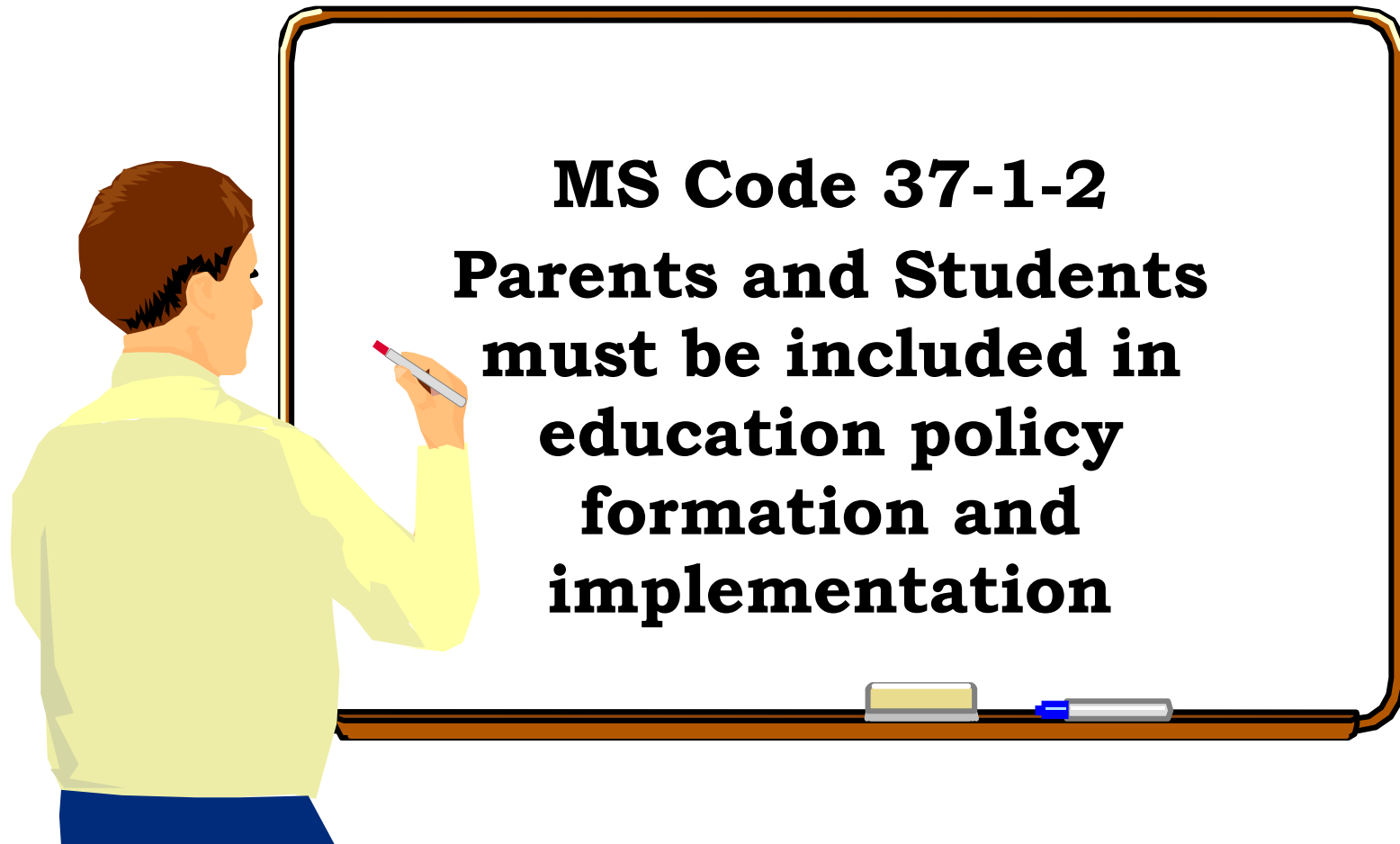
**A sample of examples of grassroots community use of data to analyze what is happening in their communities and to shape their recommendations for changes in education policy:**

**Quantitative data:**

- **Community organizations have used data provided by the MS Dept. of Education, NAEP, Rural Schools and Community Trust, US Dept. of Education, the Manhattan Institute and other research facilities to create tables, charts and maps that enable parents, students, educators, public officials and legislators to visualize:**
  - a. The persistence of the student achievement gap in performance on standardized tests across 3-year cohorts in MS grades 2 through 8;**
  - b. The correlation between critical teacher shortages and student performance on standardized tests;**
  - c. The correlation between low-wealth under-performing majority-black school districts and the location of new prisons in the State of Mississippi; and**
  - d. The impact of funding of MAEP and the children at-risk enhancement component on the financial resources of each school district.**

**Qualitative data:**

- **In many school districts community organizations have brought parents and students together with school officials, educators, public officials and legislators to enable parents and students to share their experiences with patterns of abuse or denial of rights. This collective use of credible qualitative data assists skeptical school officials, educators, public officials and legislators to understand the reality of school for many parents and children in ways that only live exchanges can. Sometimes cold statistics simply do not enable people to appreciate the impact of conditions.**



- The research-based evidence consistently shows that **effective parent and student engagement in education policy formation and implementation** is a keystone to the success of transforming the culture of public education and instituting meaningful reforms. That is why grassroots organizations of parents and students need to be an integral part of the process.
  - This principle is embroidered in the fabric of Mississippi education law at **MS Code 37-1-2**, where it states:

**“SEC. 37-1-2. Legislative findings and determinations; state policy.**

The legislature finds and determines that the **quality of public education** and its effect upon the social, cultural and economic enhancement of the people of Mississippi **is a matter of public policy**, the object of which is the education and performance of its children and youth. The legislature hereby declares the following to be **the policy of the State of Mississippi**:

(a) That the **students, parents, general citizenry, local schoolteachers and administrators, local governments, local school boards, and state government have a joint and shared responsibility for the quality of education** delivered through the public education system in the State of Mississippi ....

(h) To encourage the **common efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators and business and professional leaders for the establishment of specific goals for performance ....”**

- We should also note that 37-1-2 sets a standard for what parents and students are entitled to expect from a Mississippi public education as a matter of state policy, as embodied in state law:

(f) To provide quality education for all school-age children in the state;

(g) That excellence and high achievement of all students should be the ultimate goal;

- As a matter of state policy (37-1-2), it is not sufficient to graduate students. The public school systems have a duty to provide a “quality education” accessible to “all students”, notwithstanding that the MS Adequate Education Program funding formula legislation only talks in terms of “... Adequate ...”.
- **The State cannot provide a “quality education” unless the State and local school districts provide sufficient funds to deliver a “quality education”.**
  - Consequently, all parents and students have a corresponding right to a quality education as a matter of state law. See 37-1-2(f) and (g). Further, under 37-1-2(h) parents and students are supposed to be part of the process by which a quality education is defined, policies designed to enable it, and strategies implemented to achieve it.
- So – here is the crux of the dilemma and why we have to proceed with a comprehensive analysis of the problem and its solutions:

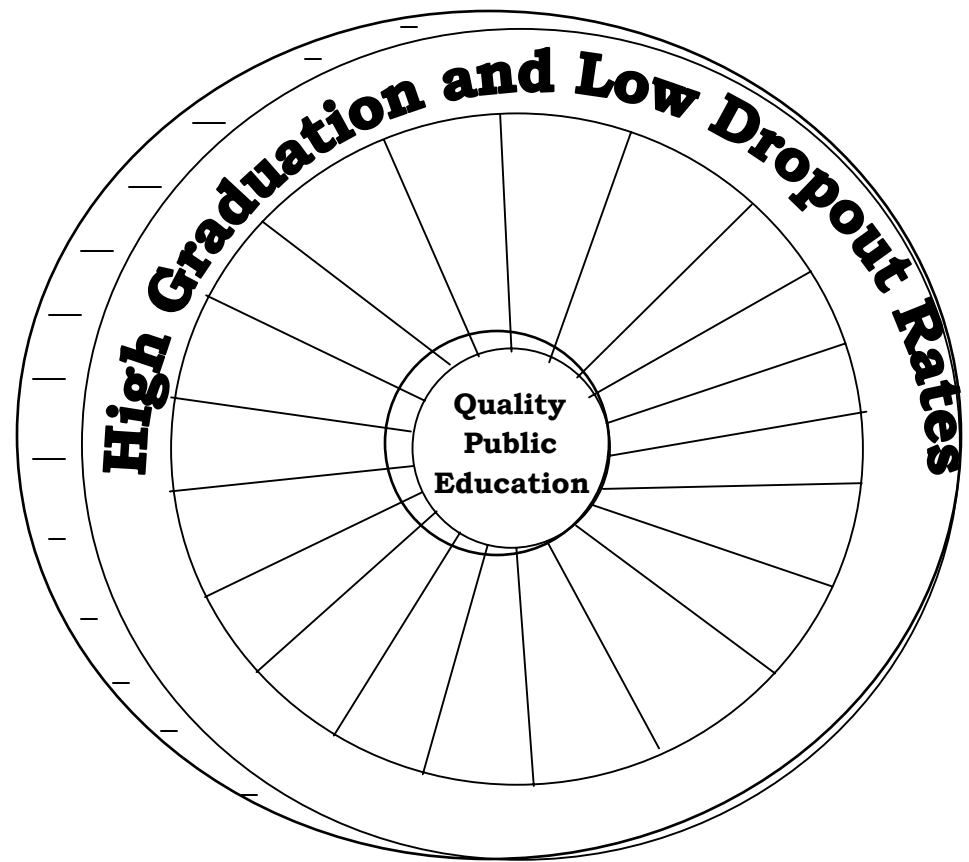
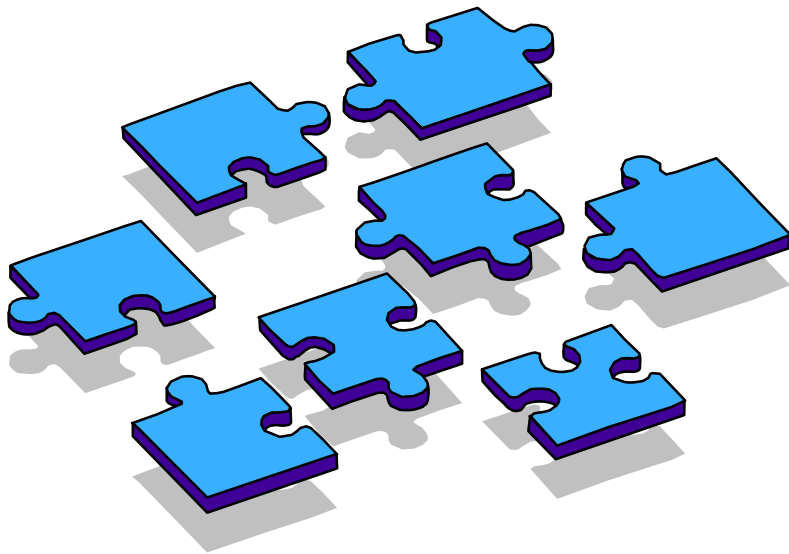
*We need to keep children in school so that they can obtain a quality education that prepares them to be effective citizens. But we need to be able to deliver effectively a quality education in order to keep our children in school.*

The question, therefore, is: What is to be done?

### **3. Spokes of the Wheel and Pieces of the Puzzle -- Maximizing strategic impact through program coordination**

- **Public schools are key to the development of a culture.** This is one of the key arenas where our children develop their knowledge, understanding, skills and tools, norms for behavior, sense of themselves, expectations for themselves and others, and capacity to deal with adversity and success.
  - **Public schools are a function of the culture.** They do not exist in isolation from the culture. Quite to the contrary. Public schools tend to reflect what is going on in the culture, for better or worse.
  - **Many of the problems that public schools have are deeply-rooted in the culture.** For example, the student achievement gap across race and class lines is the intended consequence of conscious policies. The Hampton Plan set this course in 1868 and our elementary and secondary school children are still faced with systemic under-preparation for higher education or the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- **The low graduation and high dropout rates do not result from a single cause** or a two-dimensional imperfection in the way schools function. Rather, these outcomes are a symptom of the conjunction of problems that are deeply rooted in the culture. The remedies needed require an analysis and set of strategies appropriate to the complexity of the problem.

**Coordinating education programs is like bringing together the many pieces of a complex jigsaw puzzle. It is imperative to be able to identify all the pieces, understand their uses, assess how they fit together in the larger picture, and then enable them to work together to maximize their intended impact.**



**The many and varied education programs are like the spokes of a wheel. As individual programs they have little capacity to have the intended impact. When they are coordinated together inside the analytical wheel and coordinated to work together they can maximize their impact.**

**Toward these ends there is a need for:**

- a. The development of a **comprehensive and accurate analysis**, rooted in truth-telling, of the nature of the problems faced regarding graduation and dropout rates;**
- b. The building of an **understanding of all the programs**, federal, state and local, that are intended to have an impact on some aspect of the problems identified in the analysis;**
- c. The use of **training and re-training** for all education stakeholders -- including parents, students, educators and public officials – to deal with the problems of bureaucracy, turf, customs and practices that function like deep mud under the wheels of progress;**
- d. A **strategy for coordination** of all of these programs in order to maximize their effect in addressing the underlying problems;**
- e. Support for and enabling of the **systematic involvement of parents and students** in the policy work in order to take advantage of their knowledge and capacity and to ensure their effective investment in the process.**





#### 4. Spokes of the Wheel and Pieces of the Puzzle – Some elements that need to be considered in the development of a coordinated Dropout Prevention Plan

##### A key working premise:

- **Keep students in school.** When students are not in school they cannot learn, cannot succeed in school and eventually will not finish school. **No Child Left Behind, IDEIA, Child Find, Title I**, the state's **Teacher Support Team** regulations, and **effective alternative education placements** are all rooted in the premise that everything must be done to keep students in schools and provide them with the education and support services that they need and to which they are entitled. We do not have to re-invent this wheel or create new pieces of the puzzle. So, as part of a coordinated strategy:
- **Enforce student and parent rights under Due Process of law.** It is urgent that we eliminate arbitrary and capricious policies, customs and practices that push students out of school, onto the streets and toward the jailhouse.
  - The Mississippi Supreme Court held in the juvenile case of *T.H. III* that every child has the right to a free public education under the **Due Process Clause** of the Mississippi Constitution. The United States Supreme Court held in *Goss v. Lopez* that a student has a property right in his public education that is protected by the **Due Process Clause** of the United States Constitution.
  - These cases involved the suspension and expulsion of students. The Courts held that the students have constitutional rights that must not be denied by arbitrary rules, regulations, customs or practices, or by the capricious and unpredictable enforcement of them.

Visualizing the connection between enforcement of Due Process rights of parents and students with existing programs that are intended to assist students to stay in school, learn and graduate with their class.

1. Compliance with Federal and state law is a **duty** of the school district.
2. For every duty of the school district the parents and students have a **corresponding right** to require compliance by the school district.
3. The state has a **duty** to provide each school district with the **funds necessary** to comply with the law!

\* IDEIA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

\* IEP = development and implementation of Individual Education Plan

\* IIP = development and implementation of Individual Instruction Plan

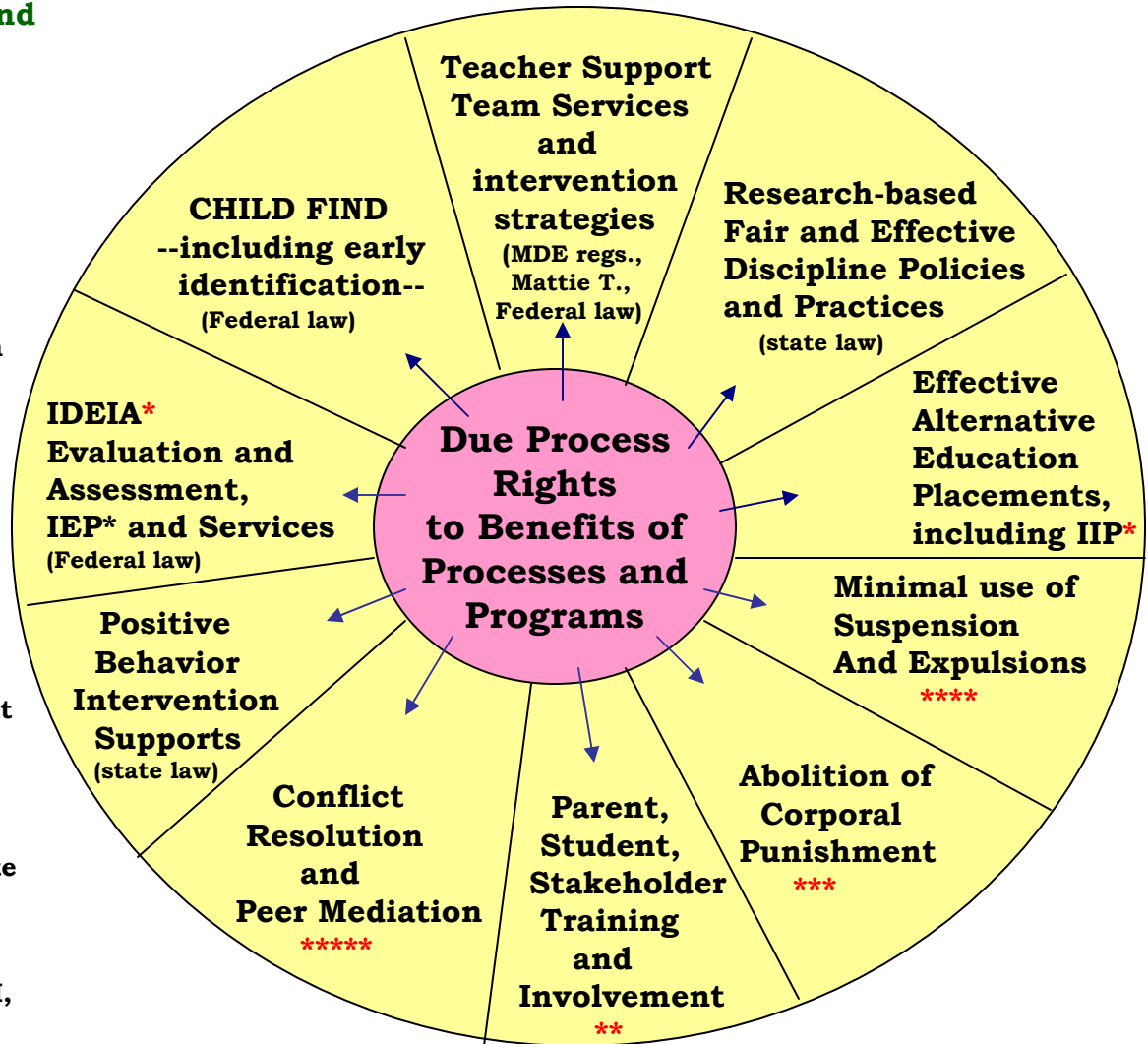
\*\* Parent and Student Training, Involvement

\*\* Training for School Bd members, Supts., Administrators, Teachers, support staff, municipal and county officials

\*\*\* Use of corporal punishment violates state law requirement to use discipline rooted in research-based evidence

\*\*\*\* See, for ex., MS S. Ct. decision in TH III, Teacher Support Team, Title I, etc.

\*\*\*\*\* See state law on Safe and Orderly Schools



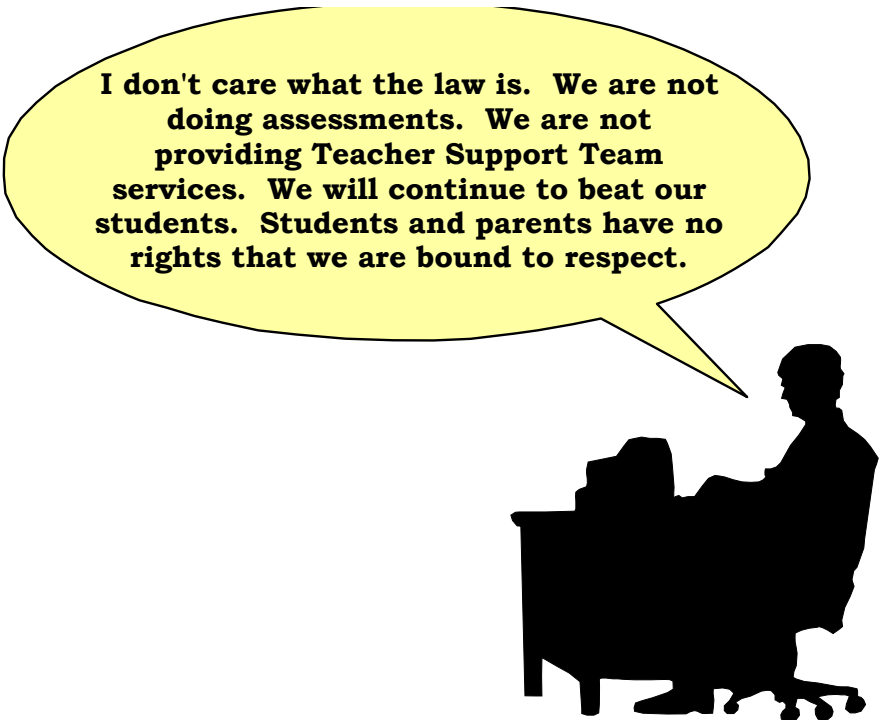
## **Examples of due process violations:**

### **Example # 1:**

Student A finds out one morning that he has failed his 9-week test. That afternoon during class Student B, who is a good student, calls Student A “stupid” because Student A is doing poorly in several classes they have together. Student A is hurt and angered and yells loudly at Student B to stop taunting him.

The teacher stops the argument and sends Student A to the principal for disrupting the class. The teacher recommends that Student A be beaten or suspended. The Principal gives Student A a choice: 5 licks with the paddle or a 9-day suspension. Student A feels bad about himself and does not want to be in school right now, anyway. Student A elects the 9-day suspension. The Principal suspends Student A for 9 days. Student A does not get any education services during the 9 days.

**HOW MANY DIFFERENT DUE PROCESS RIGHTS OF THE STUDENT AND HIS PARENT OR GUARDIAN WERE VIOLATED BY THE CONDUCT OF THE TEACHER AND THE PRINCIPAL?**



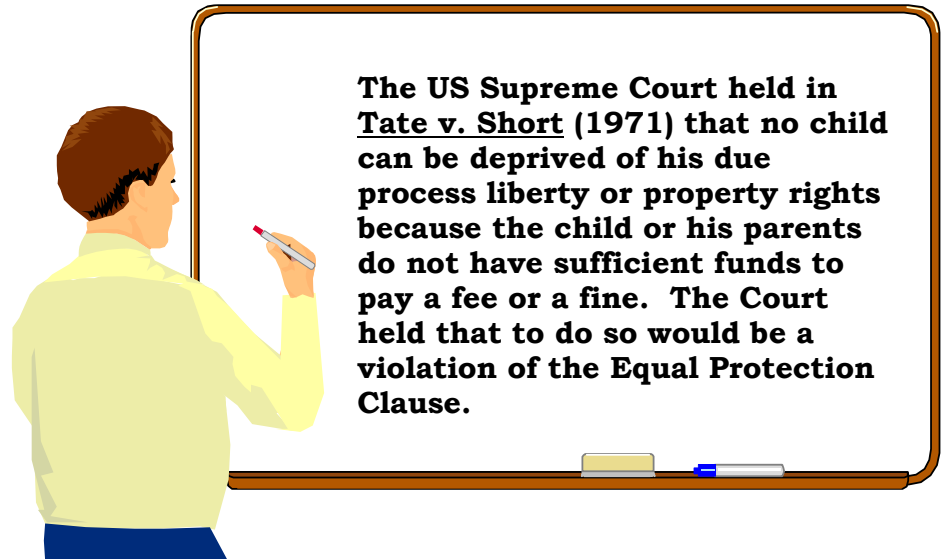
**I don't care what the law is. We are not doing assessments. We are not providing Teacher Support Team services. We will continue to beat our students. Students and parents have no rights that we are bound to respect.**

### **Example # 2:**

Student C finds out when he registers for school that he must pay a registration fee that covers certain school activities and class materials for his courses. At the same time Student C's mother, who is the sole support for four children in the school district, provides personal economic data that qualifies her children as students "at-risk" under the US Dept. of Agriculture guidelines and "at-risk" qualification standards under the MS Adequate Education Program. Student C and his three siblings all qualify for free lunch under the guidelines. Student C's mother does not have sufficient funds with which to pay the registration fee for any of her children.

Student C is told by the school Principal that he cannot register for school because of the failure to pay the registration fee and is sent home. The three siblings of Student C are also denied registration by their respective Principals and are sent home. The Principal tells Student C's mother that none of her children will be allowed in school until the registration fees are paid.

**HOW MANY DIFFERENT RIGHTS OF THE STUDENT AND HIS PARENT OR GUARDIAN WERE VIOLATED BY THE CONDUCT OF THE PRINCIPAL?**



The US Supreme Court held in Tate v. Short (1971) that no child can be deprived of his due process liberty or property rights because the child or his parents do not have sufficient funds to pay a fee or a fine. The Court held that to do so would be a violation of the Equal Protection Clause.

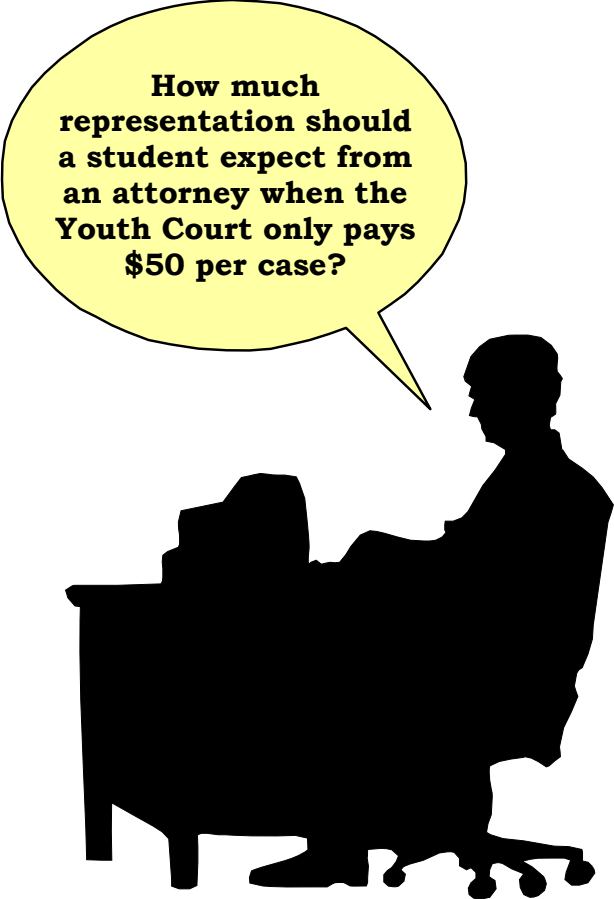
### **Example # 3:**

**Student D is ten years old and in elementary school. Student D and Student E are on the playground during recess playing basketball. Student D and Student E argue loudly about the game. Student D pushes Student E and Student E pushes back. Student E trips and falls backward on the ground, scraping his elbow.**

**Two teachers are busy talking with each other at one end of the playground. They see the dispute, intervene after it is over, and send both students to the Principal for discipline. The Principal suspends the students and recommends expulsion. The School Board expels both students for 12 calendar months. Since it is March this means that each student will be unable to complete the current year and will return the following year too late to get credit for the following year. As a consequence, each will fall two years behind.**

**The Superintendent also refers the two students to the Youth Court for prosecution as juvenile delinquents. The Court appoints a single attorney to represent both students. The attorney interviews each student for 5 minutes and recommends they plead no contest to the charges. The parents of each student complain to the Youth Court Judge that the attorney did not provide meaningful representation. The Youth Court rejects the parents' concerns and orders both students to a period of months at the Training School, where they will receive little or no effective educational or other support services.**

**HOW MANY DIFFERENT RIGHTS OF THE STUDENT AND HIS PARENT OR GUARDIAN WERE VIOLATED BY THE CONDUCT OF THE TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, SUPERINTENDENT, SCHOOL BOARD AND YOUTH COURT JUDGE?**



**How much representation should a student expect from an attorney when the Youth Court only pays \$50 per case?**

#### **Example # 4:**

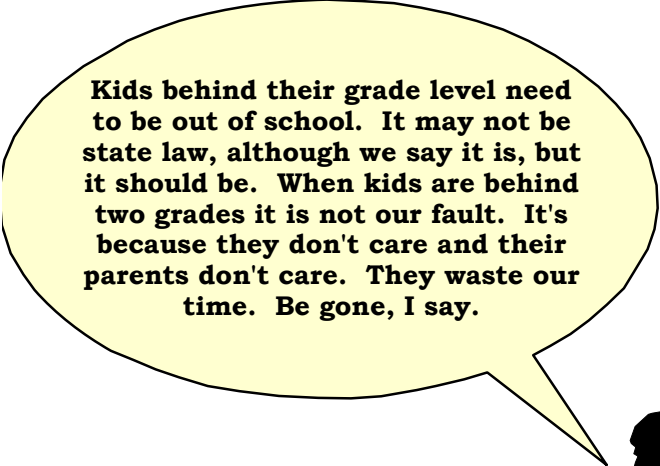
**Student E is almost 18 years old and has enough academic credits to be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Student E is a B+ student. However, Student E has missed a great deal of school due to Sickle cell anemia.**

**The school guidance counselor held a meeting with Student E to advise Student E that:**

- she was two years behind her age group,**
- she could not graduate with her class,**
- she was too old to be in school another two years,**
- that the school district would not let her continue to attend the high school because that was the state law,**
- that it would be in her best interest to drop out of school to get her GED, and**
- that if she did not drop out to get her GED that she would not be allowed to continue at the high school, so she would not get to graduate anyway.**

**Student E was distraught. Her mother was angry. Together they explained to the guidance counselor that Student E needs to graduate high school so that she can attend a 4-year college. The guidance counselor replied that she wasn't qualified to go to any 4-year college and that such a goal would prove bitterly disappointing "for a girl like her." The guidance counselor insisted that Student E leave school now, and implied that she should stop trying to be more than she had a right to be.**

**HOW MANY DIFFERENT RIGHTS OF THE STUDENT AND HER PARENT WERE VIOLATED BY THE CONDUCT OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR?**



**Kids behind their grade level need to be out of school. It may not be state law, although we say it is, but it should be. When kids are behind two grades it is not our fault. It's because they don't care and their parents don't care. They waste our time. Be gone, I say.**



### **Example # 5:**

**Student F is in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school. The student is subject to the school district Uniform Dress Code.**

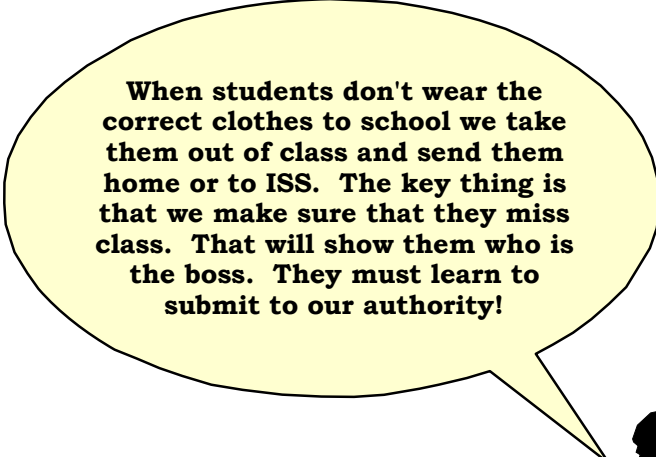
**The dress code states that:**

- **the pants worn by a student cannot have stitching on the pants that are a different color than the color of the pants;**
- **the pants worn by a student must be blue, provided that the shade of blue is not too dark and not too light (compare pants color with “permitted color scale” printed in Handbook);**
- **the undershirt worn by the student must be white and the socks worn by the student must be white;**
- **a student in violation of the dress code must be removed from class by the teacher, must automatically receive a zero for each day the student is in violation of the dress code, and the student will not be permitted to take any tests during those days, nor make them up.**

**Student F enters school wearing a blue pair of pants that has a manufacturer-designed brown stitching on the back pocket of blue pants, a light gray undershirt and light gray socks.**

**The classroom teacher searches each child that enters the classroom to determine if the child is attired in violation of the dress code.**

**Student F is sent to the Office for discipline because his pants are too-light blue, the pocket stitching does not match the pants, his undershirt is not white, and neither are his socks.**



**When students don't wear the correct clothes to school we take them out of class and send them home or to ISS. The key thing is that we make sure that they miss class. That will show them who is the boss. They must learn to submit to our authority!**



**HOW MANY DIFFERENT RIGHTS OF THE STUDENT WERE VIOLATED BY APPLICATION OF THE UNIFORM DRESS CODE?**



**Following is a list of programs and requirements that have been mandated either by federal or state laws or regulations to keep children in school, enable them to learn, and provide the supports needed for them to graduate on time. It is unfortunate in many school districts that all or parts of this framework are violated rather than implemented.**

- **IDEIA – Evaluation and Assessment, IEP and Services**
- **Individual Education Plans, development and implementation of ...**
- **Child Find, including early identification**
- **Title I and Title IV Dropout Prevention Strategies**
- **Local School Dist. Dropout Prevention Plans**
- **Healthy Schools Programs**
- **Positive Behavior Intervention Supports**
- **Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation**
- **Teacher Support Teams Services and intervention strategies**
- **Effective Alternative Education Placements, including IIP**
- **School Psychologist and Counselor Services**
- **Classroom Management Skills Training (Title II)**
- **Leadership Development Training for Administrators and Teachers**
- **Qualified teachers in every classroom**
- **Parent Training and Involvement**

## Summary

Under our existing Constitution, statutes and regulations the Working Principles ought to be:

1. Keep children in school. It is wrong to put a student out of school for any reason short of a clear and present threat to the safety of other students or the student's own self. To do so contradicts and undermines the goals of the programs and regulations set forth above. Further, even when a child must be put out of school, there must be effective education and other support services provided to that student.
2. Provide a quality education to all students. Students must receive all of the educational and support services to which they are entitled.
3. Coordinate planning and implementation of federal and state programs and regulations through the new MDE Dropout Prevention – Maximize Graduation process.
4. Involve parents and students in the planning and implementation of the new MDE Dropout Prevention – Maximize Graduation process.
5. Fully fund the MS Adequate Education Program AND fully fund the needed increase in the MAEP formula for students at-risk.
6. Enable parents, students, and other community education stakeholders to be involved in the formation and implementation of education policy.

**Part I:**  
**Guidelines for the Development of**  
**Local Dropout Prevention Teams**  
**&**  
**Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention**

**Dropout Prevention in Mississippi:**  
**Developing Educational**  
**Partnerships for Academic**  
**Success!**



## Purpose

The draft version of the Mississippi Statewide Dropout Prevention Plan was presented to the Dropout Prevention Taskforce on November 1, 2006. The plan details current state-level initiatives in dropout prevention, presents timelines for six implementation goals, and sets forth seven additional critical components for future implementation. Using the 15 Strategies for Dropout Prevention (from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network) as the conceptual framework, the various initiatives listed in the plan seek to accomplish three overarching goals:

1. Increase the graduation rate for cohort classes on a systematic basis to 85% by the 2018-2019 school year, as mandated by Mississippi Code §37-13-80;
2. Reduce the dropout rate by 50% by 2012-2013; and
3. Reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50% by 2012-2013.

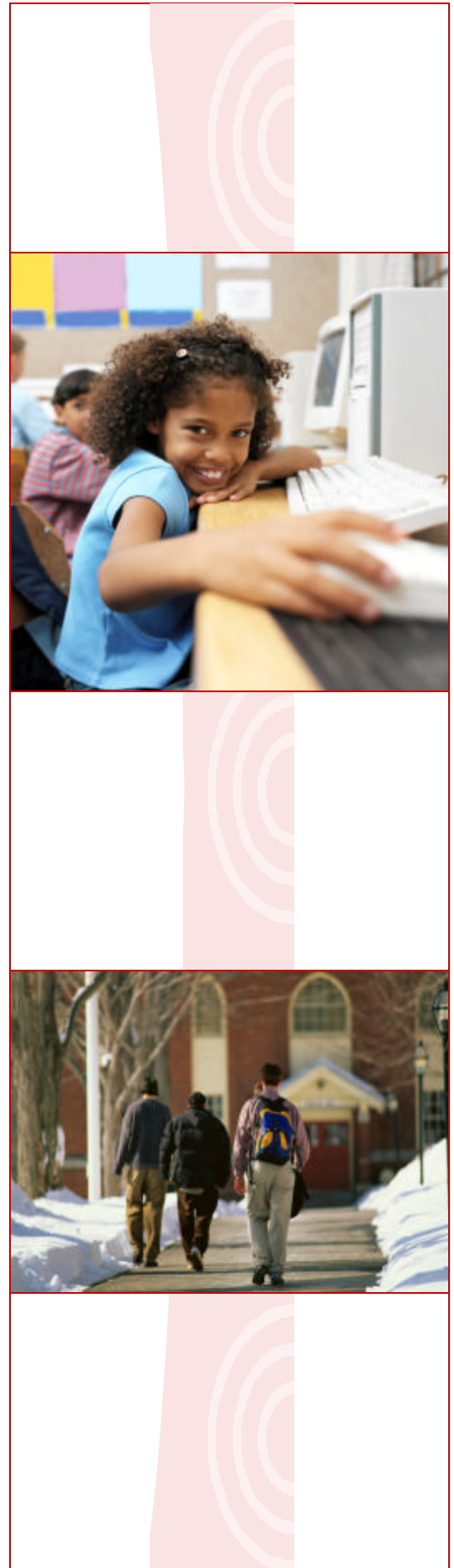
### *Implementation Goals*

**Implementation Goal I** in the state plan indicates that the Mississippi Department of Education will provide comparative data on Mississippi's grade 9-12 cohort dropout rate and grade 7-12 cohort dropout rate, according to the following timeline:

- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2001-2002
- By April 1, 2007 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2002-2003
- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 4-year (9-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with ninth grade students in 2003-2004
- By April 1, 2008 – official state, district, and school level 6-year (7-12) dropout rates for the cohort beginning with seventh grade students in 2001-2002

During the November 2006 board meeting of the State Board of Education, state and district level graduation and dropout rates were presented. The data were then approved in the December board meeting. According to the timeline above, additional data will be forthcoming in April 2007.

In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal II** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan, it is the purpose of this document to



present the formal request to districts for the submission of names and areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Local Dropout Prevention Team.

### ***Future Reports***

Future reports from the Office of Dropout Prevention will fulfill the requirements of **Implementation Goals IV through VII**, which are listed below:

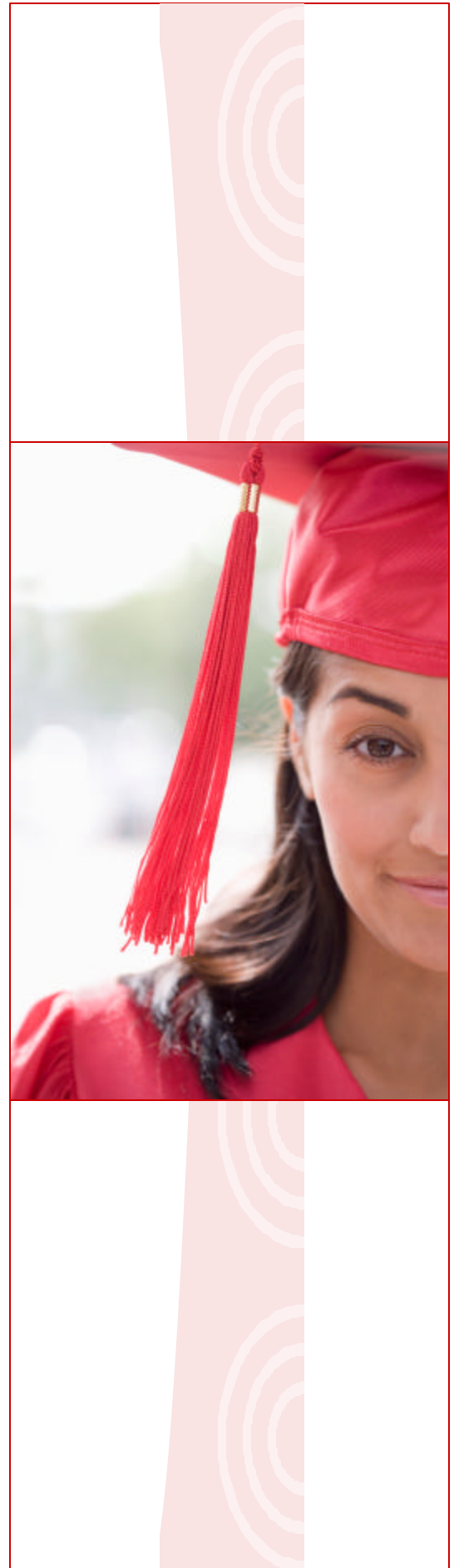


- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities will be available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment.
- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Plan (LDP) for Dropout Prevention. The district framework will include model implementation timelines, regional training schedules and required deliverables for Local Dropout Prevention Team meetings. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).
- During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans. Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:
  - September - Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
  - October - Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
  - November - Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts
- Local districts should submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule
  - Northern School Districts - February 1, 2008
  - Central School Districts - March 3, 2008
  - Southern School Districts - April 1, 2008

- Local school boards should adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.
- Local plans should be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.

In addition to providing guidelines for implementation, the reports will also present information on current national and state level research and initiatives. The information will aid school districts and stakeholders in making research-based and data-driven decisions while developing the dropout prevention plans. Refer to pages 9-16, **Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention, for this information**. It is the hope of the Office of Dropout Prevention that this work will prove useful in allowing school districts and stakeholders to make research-based and data-driven decisions in the work of dropout prevention.

The following sections of this booklet set forth the guidelines for the development of Local Dropout Prevention Team.





## Guidelines for the Development of Local Dropout Prevention Team

Implementation Goal II of the State Dropout Prevention plan requires local districts to submit to the MDE by April 2, 2007 a list of areas of responsibility for proposed members of their district-level Dropout Prevention Team. The following guidelines will assist local districts with the development of their Local Dropout Prevention Team.

### 1. Who should be on the Local Dropout Prevention Team?

The Local Dropout Prevention Team should be established by the local school district and should be composed of ten to fifteen members who represent the following groups:

#### Local Civic/Governmental Agency Representatives

Mayor/Councilman/Alderman  
Judge/Court Administrator  
Government Agency (i.e., DHS, RESA, etc.)  
Community and Junior College  
College/University  
Law Enforcement  
Juvenile Justice System

#### Local Community Representatives

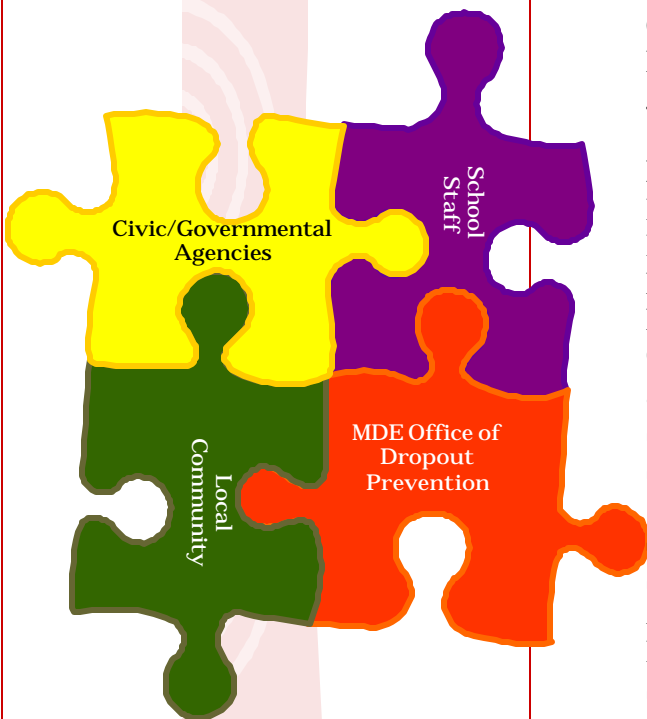
Parents  
Business Partners  
Local Chamber of Commerce  
Faith-Based Organization  
Other County/Community Agency (i.e., grassroots advocacy group)  
Students  
School Board Members

#### School-Related Staff

Superintendent  
Alternative Education Representative  
Principals (elementary, middle, and high school)  
Special Education Director  
School Counselors  
School Social Worker  
Lead Teacher (elementary, middle, and high school)  
MSIS / Attendance Coordinator

**At a minimum, the Local Dropout Prevention Team should include at least three representatives from each of the groups above. It is strongly recommended that Local Dropout Prevention Teams include at least one MDE School Attendance Officer**

### *Dropout Prevention Teams*





(SAO). The SAO will fulfill the role of the MDE representative on the Dropout Prevention Team.

## **2. Who selects the members of the Local Dropout Prevention Team?**

The selection of Local Dropout Prevention Team members should be the responsibility of the local school Superintendent. The Superintendent, however, should make every effort to ensure equitable representation from each of the three suggested groups (civic/ governmental agency representatives, community representatives, and school staff) in order to develop strong partnerships and provide a broad foundation for the work of dropout prevention.

## **3. Who should lead the Local Dropout Prevention Team?**

Ideally, the Local Dropout Prevention Team should be led by the school district Superintendent. However, the Superintendent may, at his or her discretion, designate a representative to lead the Team.

## **4. What are the responsibilities of the Local Dropout Prevention Team Leader?**

The Dropout Prevention Team Leader will be responsible for the following areas:

- Convening meetings of the Team,
- Serving as the local district's main point of contact with the MDE's Office of Dropout Prevention,
- Communicating to the Team information and guidance he or she has received from the Office of Dropout Prevention, and
- Facilitating the selection and implementation of dropout prevention strategies.

## **5. What other roles should be assumed on the Dropout Prevention Team?**

Other roles for the Dropout Prevention Team may include these:

***Team Sponsor***—Possibly a member of the local business community, this individual provides support by sponsoring activities such as award ceremonies and certificates of achievement. The Team Sponsor may also provide resources such as access to copy/fax machines or other equipment.

***Team Parent***—A parent of a child in the school district, this individual should be selected to encourage and recruit other parents and associates to the Team to help take ownership of the team from a parental perspective, enabling increased parental involvement.

**Team Associate**—A community representative that exhibits an ‘expert’ or unique perspective to add to the Team efforts. The Team Associate should be willing to support the Team in such areas as obtaining /researching community programs and resources, and possibly donating time to fundraising for the district.

## **6. What will be the ongoing responsibilities of the Local Dropout Prevention Team?**

The Local Dropout Prevention Team will be responsible for implementing the following goals:

### **Identifying**

- Data-based Indicators that may contribute to a student’s decision to drop out of school
- Resources to aid in the development of the district needs assessment
- Resources for training educators in addressing various issues associated with at-risk students

### **Developing**

- A plan that incorporates support programs for at-risk students
- Policy statements regarding district-level dropout prevention strategies
- A plan for the partnership between school officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school
- Plans that incorporate parent training to provide strategies for motivating their children to stay in school
- Plans for transitioning students from Juvenile Detention Centers back to the local educational system.

### **Implementing**

- District dropout prevention plans
- Staff development training that incorporates instructional strategies for student motivation and participation in learning

When local school districts have selected the members of their Local Dropout Prevention Team, please submit the areas of responsibility to Mrs. Paulette Brinson, Project Officer, Office of Dropout Prevention via fax to (601) 576-3504.

### **Please *do not* mail submissions.**

Once received, Dropout Prevention Team information will be posted to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention website.

## Local Dropout Prevention Team Members

**School District:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Telephone #:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax #:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail address for Superintendent/Team Leader:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check one area for each:**

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## Supporting Data on Dropout Prevention

### *National Research*

Thirty years ago, most teenagers who dropped out of high school could still expect to find a well-paying job. Further, given the work ethic of the time, the common practice was that most people who worked hard could expect to climb the economic ladder and eventually live a comfortable, middle-class life. This notion, however, has drastically changed. Today, high school dropouts face a double-dose of diminishing opportunities and a lifetime of financial struggle. National data demonstrates that the median earnings of families headed by a high school dropout declined by nearly a third between 1974 and 2004.

The recently released report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) presents the following findings:

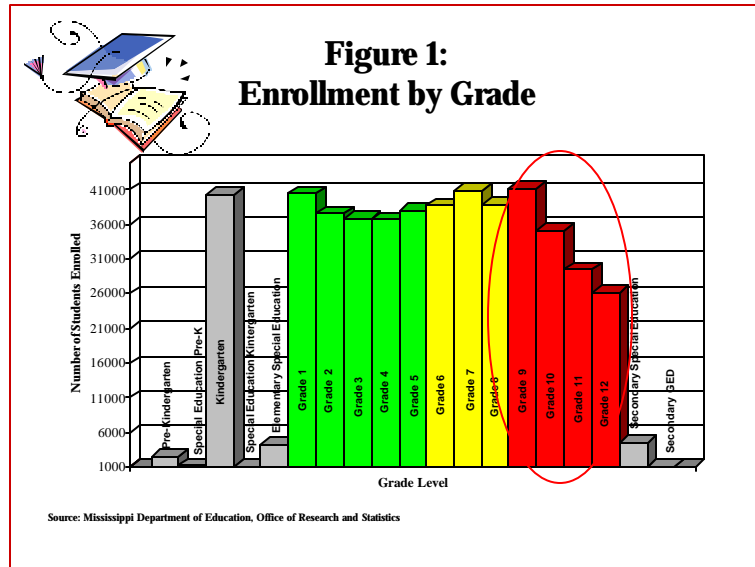
- Approximately 5 out of every 100 students enrolled in high school in October 2003 left school before October 2004 without completing a high school program.
- Hispanic students were the most likely to drop out in 2004 (8.9 percent), followed by black students (5.7 percent), white students (3.7 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (1.2 percent).
- In 2004 the dropout rate for students living in low-income families was approximately four times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (10.4 percent versus 2.5 percent).
- Students who pursue a high school education past the typical high school age are at higher risk than others of becoming a dropout.

### *Mississippi's Perspective*

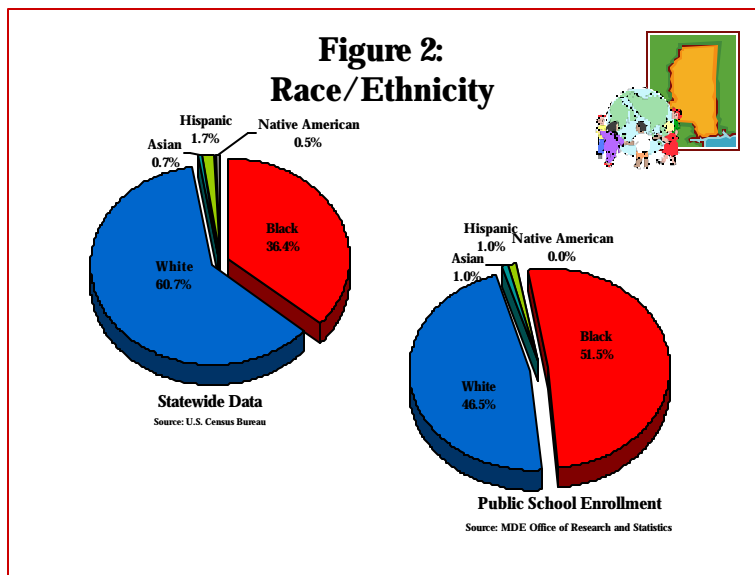
A recent report from the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) presents what it perceives as Mississippi's dire situation. The report states that "twenty-seven percent of Mississippi adults had no high school diploma in 2000." Data from 2004 places Mississippi 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of degree attainment – approximately twenty percent of Mississippi adults have at least a bachelor's degree. Further, it appears that a contributing factor to the low degree attainment rate is what can be considered a "brain drain" – from 1990 to 2000 the state lost approximately 5,000 adults with college degrees and gained approximately 10,000 adults with less than a high school education within the same time period.



The Mississippi Department of Education looks at a number of elements in determining the status of education quality in the state. As shown in Figure 1, 2005-06 school enrollment rates in Mississippi are fairly consistent from first grade through eighth grade (peaking in the first and seventh grades), with an average enrollment of 38,500 students. However, enrollment rates begin to decline after the ninth grade, from 41,146 students in ninth grade to 26,205 students in twelfth grade.



As shown in Figure 2, black students comprise 36.4% of the state-wide population and 51.5% of the public school population. Conversely, 60.7% of the Mississippi population is white, while 46.5% of the public school population is white.

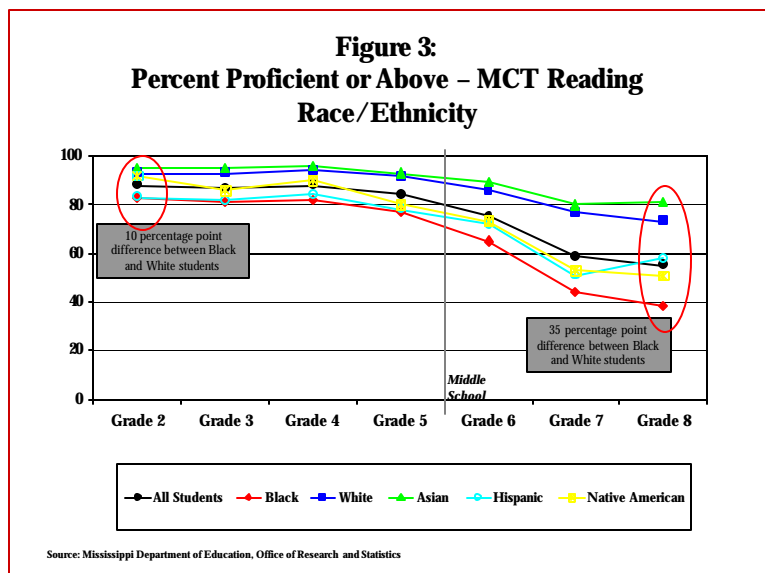


According to the National Governor's Association (NGA), the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. For these reasons, the NGA considers the achievement gap, "one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face." In Mississippi, the achievement gap between black and white students, and between economically disadvantaged versus economically advantaged students persist. Results of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) for school year 2005/2006 demonstrate three issues of concern for all areas of the MCT:

- In each academic area (reading, language arts, and mathematics), achievement decreases after middle school.
- The achievement gap between white and black students continues to grow throughout students' academic careers and persists across academic areas.
- Similar achievement gaps exist between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students.

Figures 3 and 4 present the following results for **MCT Reading**:

- Figure 3 shows that between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 4 percentage point decrease in student scoring proficient or above. However, between grades 5 and 8, there was a 29 per-

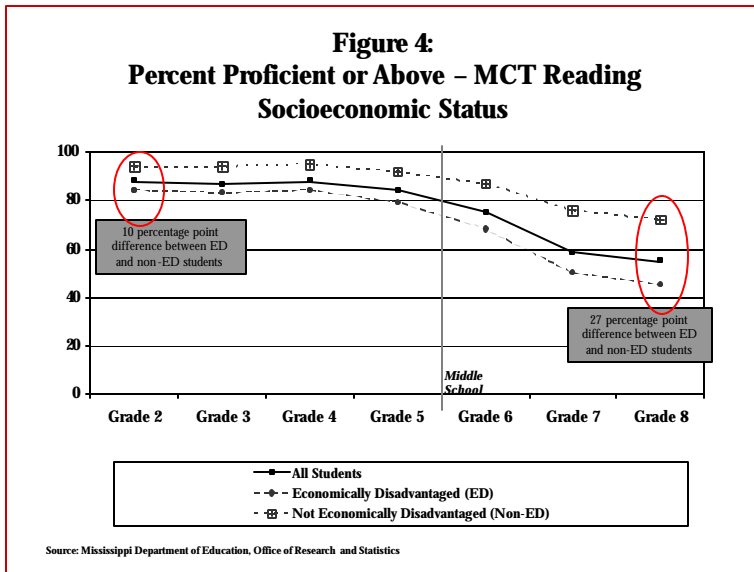


centage point decrease. These declines result in an overall 33 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.

- In terms of ethnic group differences, there was an initial 10 percentage point difference between black and white students.

However, by eighth grade, the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 35 percentage points.

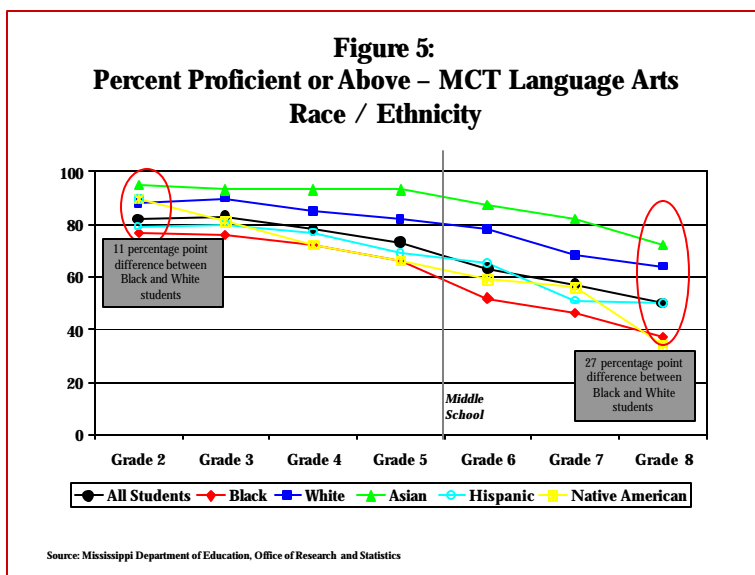
- Figure 4 shows an initial 10 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade the difference between socio-economic



status (SES) groups had increased to 27 percentage points.

Figures 5 and 6 present similar results for **MCT Language Arts**:

- Figure 5 shows that between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 9 percentage point decrease in students' scoring proficient or above. However, between grades 5 and 8, there was a 23 percentage point decrease. These declines result in an overall 32 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.



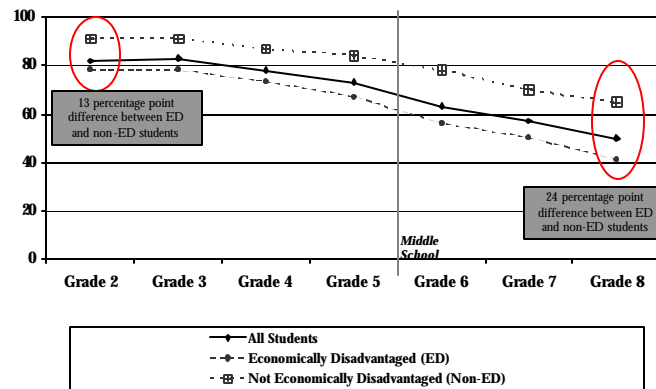
Eighty-two percent of U.S. college students say they would have worked harder if they had been more challenged in high school.



Internationally, American 8th graders rank 17th in reading, 27th in mathematics, and 20th in science.

- In terms of ethnic group differences, there was an initial 11 percentage point difference between black and white students. However, by eighth grade the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 27 percentage points.
- Figure 6 below shows an initial 10 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade, the difference between SES groups

**Figure 6:**  
**Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Language Arts**  
**Socioeconomic Status**



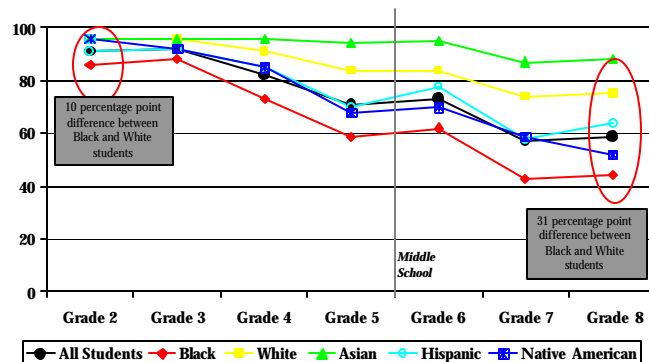
Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

had increased to 27 percentage points.

The most positive results are evidenced for **MCT Mathematics**, presented in Figures 7 and 8 below:

- Between grades 2 and 5, there was an overall 9 percentage point decrease in students' scoring proficient or above. However, between grades 5 and 8, there was a 23 percentage point decrease.

**Figure 7:**  
**Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Mathematics**  
**Race / Ethnicity**

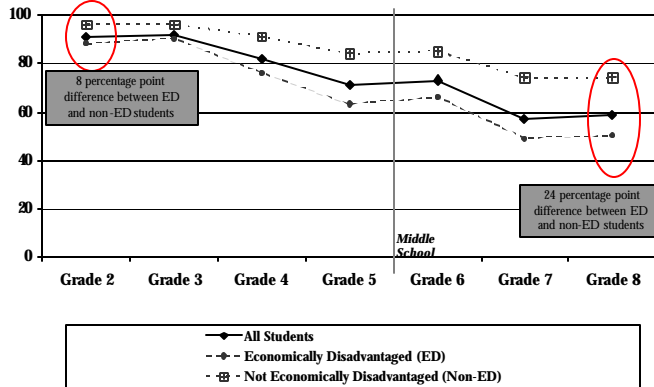


Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

These declines result in an overall 32 percentage point decrease between second grade and eighth grade.

- In terms of ethnic group differences, there was an initial 10 percentage point difference between black and white students. However, by eighth grade the difference between ethnic groups had increased to 31 percentage points.
- In terms of differences in socioeconomic status (SES) for math, Figure 8 below shows an initial 8 percentage point difference between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. However, by eighth grade the difference between SES groups had increased to 24 percentage points.

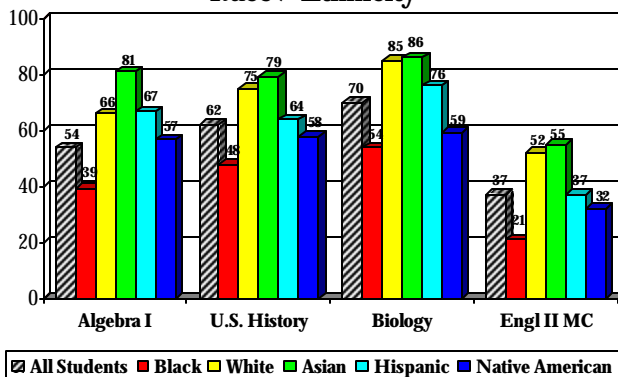
**Figure 8:**  
**Percent Proficient or Above – MCT Mathematics**  
**Socioeconomic Status**



Nationally, only **2 in 10** whites  
and **1 in 10** African Americans  
and Hispanics will earn a two- or  
four-year **COLLEGE**  
**DEGREE** by their mid-20s.

Ethnic and SES differences are similarly apparent in the results of the high school Subject Area Testing Program (SATP). Figure 9 shows

**Figure 9:**  
**Percent Proficient or Above**  
**High School Subject Area Tests**  
**Race / Ethnicity**

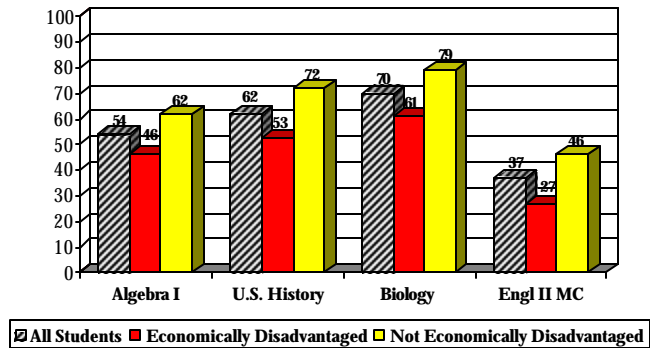


On average, a **HIGH SCHOOL** graduate saves society **\$41,000** in Medicaid costs and **\$25,000** in prison costs.

that in each area of the SATP — Algebra I, U.S. History, Biology, and English II MC — black students scored consistently lower than other ethnic groups.

Additionally, Figure 10 shows that in terms of SES, economically disadvantaged students scored lower in each area of the SATP, with the lowest overall scores being in the English II MC area.

**Figure 10:**  
**Percent Proficient or Above**  
**High School Subject Area Tests**  
**Socioeconomic Status**



Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

On average, a **COLLEGE** graduate saves society **\$71,000** in Medicaid costs and **\$34,000** in prison costs.

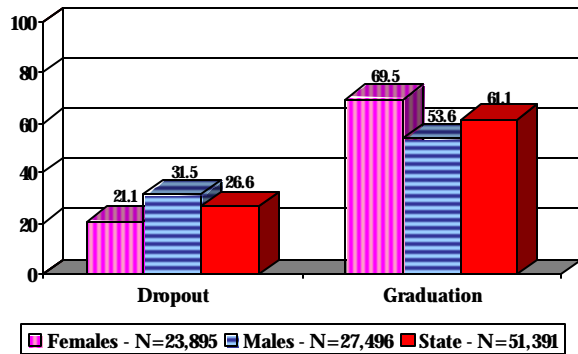
### *Dropout / Graduation Data for Mississippi*

Recently released data on the 2001-2002 4-year cohort group of students reveals a 61.1% graduation rate and a 26.6% dropout rate for the state of Mississippi. (For further information on the calculation of Mississippi's graduation and dropout rates, please see <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/account/ORS/RPTS.htm>, "Procedures for Calculating Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Counts and Rates." As previously stated, the first set of comparative data will be available in April 2007. Thus, in future years the MDE will be able to present rate changes over time.

When dropout and graduation data are disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity, the resulting information presents a slightly different perspective for the state.

As shown in Figure 11, a 10.4 percentage point difference exists between the dropout rates for males and females (31.5% versus 21.1%, respectively). In addition, an approximate 16 percentage point difference exists between the graduation rates for males and females (53.6% and 69.5%, respectively).

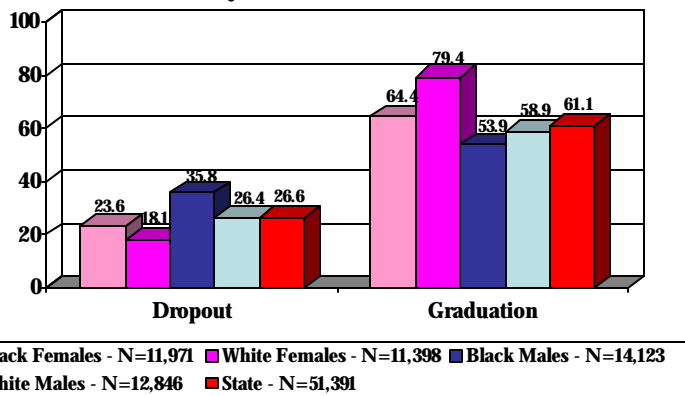
**Figure 11:**  
**Dropout / Graduation Data by Gender**



Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

An additional layer of analysis is presented in Figure 12, below. When dropout and graduation data are disaggregated by both gender and ethnicity, the data show that black males have both the highest dropout rate (35.8%) and the lowest graduation rate (53.9%). Conversely, white females were shown to have the lowest dropout rate (18.1%) and the highest graduation rate (79.4%). Thus, while previously there was a 10.4 percentage point difference between males and females, Figure 12 shows a 17.7 percentage point difference in dropout rates between white females and black males and a 25.5 percentage point difference in terms of graduation rates.

**Figure 12:**  
**Dropout / Graduation Data by Gender & Race**



Source: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics

Each of the previous data points helps to set the context for the need for the development of Local Dropout Prevention Team and the creation of Local Dropout Prevention Needs Assessment. District-level information will be made available to local school districts from the Office of Dropout Prevention upon request.

On average, a **HIGH SCHOOL** graduate earns **\$600,000** more during his/her lifetime than a dropout.

On average, a **COLLEGE GRADUATE** earns **\$1.4 million** more during his/her lifetime than a high school dropout.

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**Office of Dropout Prevention /  
Compulsory School Attendance  
Staff Contact Information**

Sheril R. Smith, Ph.D.  
Director, Office of Dropout Prevention  
601-359-3177  
[srsmith@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:srsmith@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Toni Kersh  
Bureau Director, Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement  
601-359-3180  
[tkersh@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:tkersh@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Martha Garrett  
Division Director, School Counseling  
601-359-3934  
[mgarrett@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:mgarrett@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Caldon Williams  
Division Director, Alternative Education  
601-359-3183  
[cwilliams@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:cwilliams@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Debbie Sahler  
Education Specialist, Alternative Education  
601-359-3181  
[dsahler@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:dsahler@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Dot Baskin  
Project Officer  
601-359-3178  
[dbaskin@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:dbaskin@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Paulette Brinson  
Project Officer  
601-359-3176  
[pbrinson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:pbrinson@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Regina Johnson  
Receptionist  
601-359-5743  
[rjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:rjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Jan Wortham  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Northern District  
662-675-8275  
[jwortham@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:jwortham@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Cheryl Mickens  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Central District  
662-726-4027  
[cmickens@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:cmickens@mde.k12.ms.us)

Mr. Bobby Johnson  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Southern District  
228-822-9656  
[bjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:bjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us)

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Office of Dropout Prevention  
[http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout\\_Prevention/](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout_Prevention/)

**Part II:**  
**Guidelines for the Development of a  
Local District Needs Assessment**

**Dropout Prevention in Mississippi:  
Developing Educational  
Partnerships for Academic  
Success!**



**Hank Bounds, Ph.D.**  
**Superintendent of Education**

**J. Martez Hill, MPP**  
**Deputy State Superintendent**

**Sheril R. Smith, Ph.D.**  
**Director, Office of Dropout Prevention**



## Guidelines for the Development of a Local District Needs Assessment

In fulfilling the requirements of **Implementation Goal III** of the State Dropout Prevention Plan, this document provides guidelines to local school districts on how to develop a dropout prevention needs assessment.

### *Future Reports*

Future reports from the Office of Dropout Prevention will fulfill the requirements of **Implementation Goals IV through VI**, which are listed below:

- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), technical assistance training opportunities will be available to school districts on how to effectively conduct a needs assessment.
- During the Mississippi Department of Education Summer Conference (June 3-7, 2007), the Mississippi Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Dropout Prevention will make available to local districts the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Plan (LDP) for Dropout Prevention. The district framework will include model implementation timelines, regional training schedules and required deliverables for Local Dropout Prevention Team meetings. The implementation and monitoring of the LDP fulfills Standard 17 of the Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (MS Code §37-3-46(c) and §37-21-9).
- During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) will be available to offer regional technical assistance training opportunities to school districts to assist with the development of Local Dropout Prevention Plans. Local districts will be asked to bring the draft versions of their plan to the following regional technical assistance training sessions:
  - September - Scheduled training opportunities for northern school districts
  - October - Scheduled training opportunities for central school districts
  - November - Scheduled training opportunities for southern school districts
- Local districts shall submit their DRAFT District Dropout Prevention Plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention based on the following submission schedule
  - Northern School Districts - February 1, 2008
  - Central School Districts - March 3, 2008
- Southern School Districts - April 1, 2008



- Local school boards shall adopt their Local District Dropout Prevention Plan prior to the end of the district's 2007-2008 academic year. When adopted, local districts will then submit their local plan to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention.
- Local plans shall be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year.

In addition to providing guidelines for implementation, these reports will also present information on current national and state level research and initiatives. It is the hope of the Office of Dropout Prevention that this work will prove useful in allowing school districts and stakeholders to make research-based and data-driven decisions in the work of dropout prevention.

**Implementation Goal III** of the State Dropout Prevention plan requires the MDE to make available to local districts the guidelines for a dropout prevention needs assessment. There are a wide variety of needs assessment tools available for use. However, the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention has adopted a specified format for district needs assessments. While it is not mandatory for school districts to utilize each form included here, districts will be required to adequately address each of the four areas listed below.

Staff members from the Office of Dropout Prevention will be available to provide technical assistance to districts in the development of their needs assessment.

District Dropout Prevention Teams are asked to develop a systematic set of procedures to 1) determine needs of students at risk of dropping out and recent re-enrollees from the juvenile justice system; 2) examine the nature and causes of dropping out; and 3) set priorities for future action. In addressing these tasks, local districts should address each of the following four areas in their needs assessments:

1. Identify the current needs within the school related to dropout prevention (specific populations, behaviors, curricular, monetary, etc.).
2. Prioritize the current needs.
3. Identify existing school and community resources.
4. Specify gaps between existing resources and existing prioritized needs.

Districts may opt to contract with external agencies for the completion of this needs assessment.



### **Addressing Needs Assessment Area #1—Identify the needs within the school related to dropout prevention.**

This area of the needs assessment will require the greatest amount of time and input on the part of the Local Dropout Prevention Team. There are several ways local teams may attempt to collect the data necessary to address this area. Appendix B of the State Dropout Prevention Plan presents relevant graduation and dropout data for each school district. Local Dropout Prevention Teams should utilize these data as a beginning point for their needs assessments.

While school-level graduation and/or dropout data are not currently available, Dropout Prevention Teams in districts with multiple feeder patterns should place focused attention on feeders having the greatest need. These feeders, or particular schools within the feeders may be designated as “high-risk.”

Once particular high-risk feeders and/or schools have been identified, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should attempt to identify particular students within the district who may be at greatest risk for dropping out. Methods of identifying particular students may vary; however, based on current research, the list of variables below are those most often suggested as predictors of dropping out of school. They include the following:

- Attendance
- Truancy
- Grade point average
- Achievement data
- Number of grade retentions
- Number of discipline referrals
- Educational level of parents
- Special program placements
- Number of school transfers
- Ethnic/gender distinctions
- Number of suspensions
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Pregnancy/teen parent
- Number of counseling referrals
- Time spent at a juvenile detention center
- Family status (family size, single-parent family)
- Reading and math scores (elementary and middle school)
- Participation in free/reduced lunch program

These predictive indicators are not listed in any particular order of priority, and school districts may have identified additional indicators of particular relevance to the specific district. Student data related to each of the indicators should be accessible at the local district level. Local Teams should allow this list to guide the identification of students at-risk of dropping out. Depending on the population of the district, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should determine the number/percentage of



indicators a student must meet to be highlighted for early intervention. As a targeted population, this group should comprise approximately ten percent (10%) of the district student population.

After particular feeders/schools and students have been identified, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should begin to collect perception data from various stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, and business/community partners. This data may be collected through face-to-face individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, or any combination of forms. The method of data collection will depend on factors such as time, group dynamics, and accessibility. The attached forms (Resources—pages 6-10) may be adapted for different data collection methods.

In determining the sample to survey, Local Dropout Prevention Teams should attempt to get adequate representation from all partners, including principals, teachers, school staff, parents, students, and community/business partners. Teams should also ensure that extra sampling emphasis is placed on the feeder/school and students identified as having the greatest need.

#### **Addressing Needs Assessment Area #2—Prioritize the current needs.**

Based on the information collected through the school and student data as well as the perception data, Local Dropout Prevention Teams may then begin the process of prioritizing the current needs of the school district. The prioritized lists should include a ranking of schools, student groups, school culture issues, and particular student behaviors that will need to be addressed in the eventual local dropout prevention plan.

#### **Addressing Needs Assessment Area #3—Identify existing school and community resources.**

The list of prioritized needs should then be matched against a listing of programs and initiatives already in place within the school district. Local Dropout Prevention Teams should pay particular attention not only to those initiatives in place within the schools but also to extra-curricular programs and community and faith-based initiatives available outside of school.

#### **Addressing Needs Assessment Area #4—Specify gaps between existing resources and existing prioritized needs.**

The final stage in the needs assessment will be for Local Dropout Prevention Teams to assess the gaps between what is currently available from the school district and the actual needs of the at-risk populations.

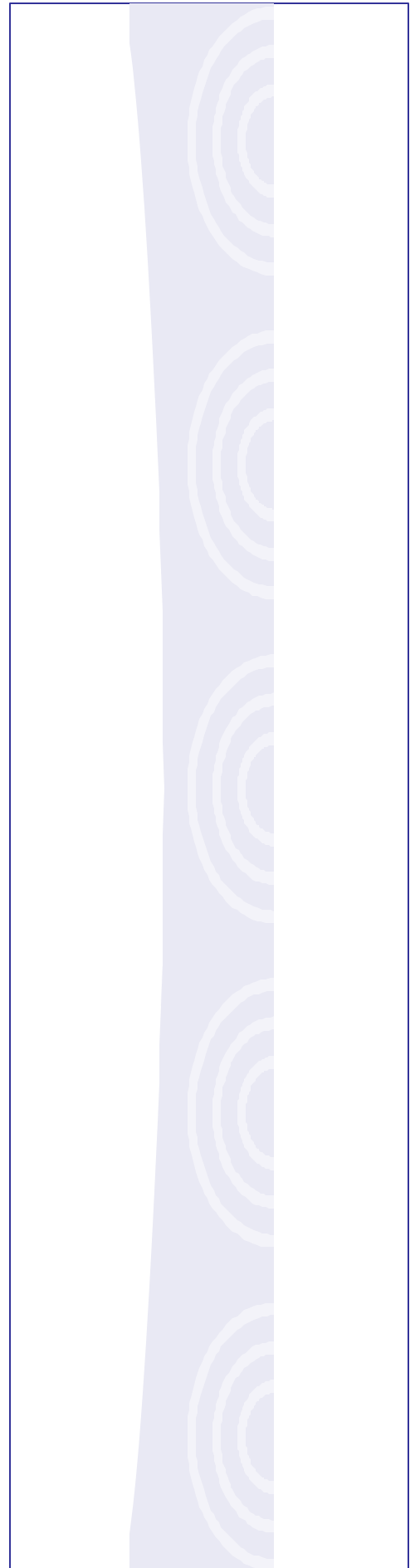
### **Summary**

Please note that the needs assessment process and forms do not need to be submitted to the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention. Rather, the



process work and forms are to be used by the Local Dropout Prevention Teams as a primary phase in the development of the local dropout prevention plans.

If any Teams require additional technical assistance in the development of the needs assessment, please contact the MDE Office of Dropout Prevention. A member of our staff will be available to provide assistance either over the telephone or in person, if necessary.



## **Resources**

### **Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Principals (Individuals or Groups)**

1. Is absenteeism or truancy a problem at your school?
2. Is dropping out a problem in your school?
3. Do you think that you can predict in elementary school which children will be likely to drop out in later years (e.g., middle and high school)?
4. What do you believe are the major risk factors for dropping out?
5. Do you have any programs in place to deal with the risk factors stated?
6. How is that program working? Is it successful? Do you see any need for changes?
7. Are there any programs that you don't have but think would be useful in dealing with these risk factors?
8. Do you think teachers would agree with your opinion of the risk factors, or would they describe other risk factors?
9. How supportive is the administration of efforts to create programs to help at risk students?



## **Resources**

### **Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Teachers (Individuals or Groups)**

1. How long have you been teaching? At this school?
2. Is absenteeism or truancy a problem at your school?
3. Is dropping out a problem at your school?
4. Do you think that you can predict in elementary school which children will be likely to drop out in later years (e.g., middle and high school)?
5. What do you believe are the major risk factors for dropping out?
6. What characteristics typify your struggling students?
7. What are the top two skills your students need to improve?
8. Are there any programs in place, or things that you do on your own, to deal with the risk factors you listed?
9. How is that program working? Is it successful? Do you see any need for changes?
10. Are there any programs that you do not have, but think would be useful to deal with these risk factors?
11. Do you think other teachers would agree with your opinion of the risk factors, or would they list other difficulties? What about the administration?



## **Resources**

### **Sample Needs Assessment Interview for Students**

1. Why do you think students are absent from school so much?
2. Why do you think students choose to drop out of school?
3. What do you think could be done to increase school attendance?
4. What would help make you more interested in coming to school? What could parents do? What could teachers do?
5. What do you think could be done to help students do better and make better grades? What could teachers do? Parents?
6. Do you think that students feel safe here at school? If not, what could be done to make this a safer place and to make students feel more comfortable?
7. Do you think there are ever things going on in the homes of students that make it difficult for them to take school seriously, or to concentrate when they get there? If so, what?
8. What do you like the most/least about school?
9. What makes learning fun for you?

### Needs Assessment Survey (for Parents, Students, Community Partners)

We are interested in determining the dropout prevention needs for our district. We believe that both absenteeism and truancy are important predictors of dropping out of school. Please rate the degree to which you believe each of the following is a possible cause of absenteeism and truancy in your school district. Please circle the number that reflects your agreement with the statement.

Possible Causes	Not a Cause		Definitely a Cause		
	1	2	3	4	5
Students come to school unprepared to do school work (e.g., they don't have books, papers, pencil; they haven't completed their homework).	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not have the social skills necessary to be successful in a school environment (communication, cooperation, following rules, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not have the basic skills that will enable them to learn (e.g., reading, writing, math)	1	2	3	4	5
Students have behavioral and/or emotional problems that interfere with learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Students have inadequate health care, and so are often home sick.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are not motivated.	1	2	3	4	5
Students do not feel safe and secure at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not taking responsibility for getting their children to school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not involved enough with school in general.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are not involved enough with their child's academics (e.g., home-work, preparedness).	1	2	3	4	5
Negative events in the child's home life are interfering with learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Schools do not have a good method of communicating with the home.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents do not feel welcomed or comfortable at their child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents do not know how to help their child be more successful at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents often do not know about PTO meetings, or other special events at their child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
Parents have too many personal problems themselves to be concerned about school attendance.	1	2	3	4	5

### Needs Assessment Survey (for Principals, Teachers, and Other School Staff)

We are interested in determining the dropout prevention needs for our district. Please comment on the need at your particular school for the following types of programs. If there are programs currently being used by your school that are not listed in this survey, please add them in the additional space provided. Please circle the response/number that reflects your opinion of the programs.

Program	We already have a program similar to this one.		If yes, we need to change or improve our current program					If no, we need a program similar to this one.				
	YES	NO	Agree			Disagree		Agree			Disagree	
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Behavioral incentives geared toward increasing attendance	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tutoring program to help students with basic reading skills	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tutoring program to help students with general academics	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Program to increase communications between home and school	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Program to help parents with parenting skills	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Partnership with local business(es)	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												
Other Program Needed (Describe)												

**Office of Dropout Prevention /  
Compulsory School Attendance  
Staff Contact Information**

Sheril R. Smith, Ph.D.  
Director, Office of Dropout Prevention  
601-359-3177  
[srsmith@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:srsmith@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Toni Kersh  
Bureau Director, Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement  
601-359-3180  
[tkersh@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:tkersh@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Martha Garrett  
Division Director, School Counseling  
601-359-3934  
[mgarrett@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:mgarrett@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Gail Simmons  
Regional Service Officer, School Counseling  
601-359-1712  
[gsimmons@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:gsimmons@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Caldon Williams  
Division Director, Alternative Education  
601-359-3183  
[cwilliams@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:cwilliams@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Debbie Sahler  
Education Specialist, Alternative Education  
601-359-3181  
[dsahler@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:dsahler@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Dot Baskin  
Project Officer  
601-359-3178  
[dbaskin@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:dbaskin@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Paulette Brinson  
Project Officer  
601-359-3176  
[pbrinson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:pbrinson@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Regina Johnson  
Receptionist  
601-359-5743  
[rjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:rjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us)

Ms. Jan Wortham  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Northern District  
662-675-8275  
[jwortham@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:jwortham@mde.k12.ms.us)

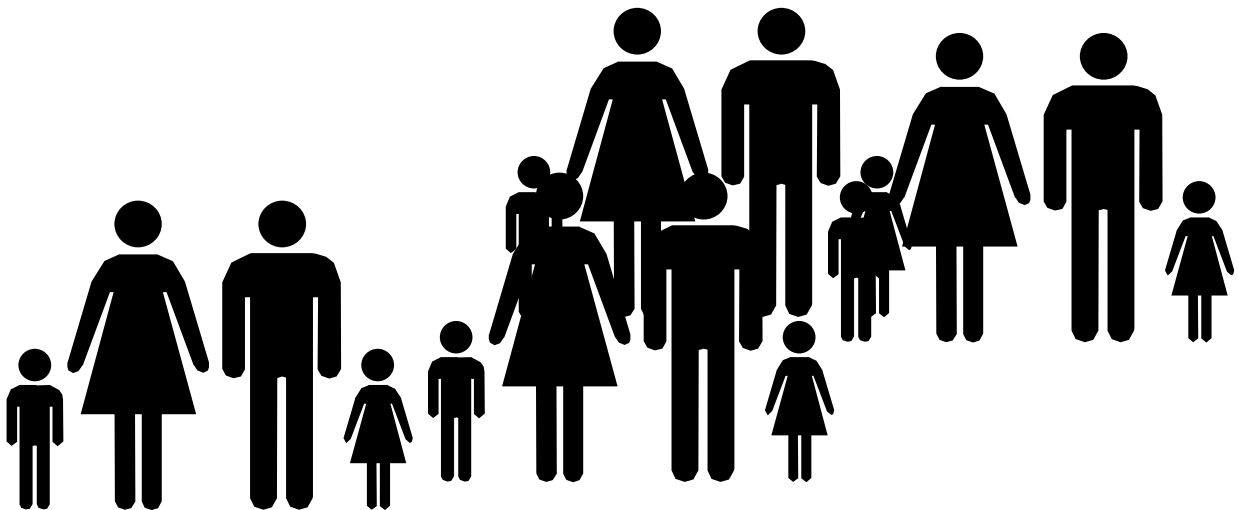
Ms. Cheryl Mickens  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Central District  
662-726-4027  
[cmickens@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:cmickens@mde.k12.ms.us)

Mr. Bobby Johnson  
School Attendance Officer Supervisor—Southern District  
228-822-9656  
[bjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:bjohnson@mde.k12.ms.us)

## ***Justice Funding:***

**Using data and experimenting with language  
to clarify policy and strategy choices in the  
struggle to create a quality public education**

**(Revised April 2006)**



Prepared by:  
**Southern Echo, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 9306  
Jackson, MS 39286  
Ph: 601-982-6400  
Fax: 601-982-2636  
[souecho@bellsouth.net](mailto:souecho@bellsouth.net)  
[www.southernecho.org](http://www.southernecho.org)

**© 2006 Southern Echo, Inc.,  
P.O. Box 9306  
Jackson, MS 39286  
601-982-6400**

**Justice Funding:  
Visualizing the Impact on Our Children  
and the Future of Our Communities When  
We Do Not Fully Fund Public Education**

**A Brief Summary of Pertinent Facts and Overview**

**Mississippi High School Graduation Rates – Class of 2002**

- Only 60 % of Mississippi public school students graduated high school.
- Therefore, 40 % of all Mississippi public school students did NOT graduate high school.
- If student outcomes do not improve, then of the nearly 493,000 students in Mississippi public schools each year we can anticipate that approximately 197,200 students will not graduate high school.

**Mississippi “College Readiness” Rates – Class of 2002**

- Only 33 %, or 1/3<sup>rd</sup>, of Mississippi public school students graduate high school “college ready”: that is, effectively prepared to undertake the minimum requirements of a 4-year college or university.
- Therefore, 67 %, or 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s, of Mississippi public school students that graduate high school are NOT “college ready”.
- Each year approximately 493,000 students attend Mississippi public schools. If we do not reduce the 40 % dropout rate, we can anticipate that only approximately 295,800 of those students WILL eventually graduate high school. By the same token, we can also anticipate that approximately 197,000 of those students now attending grades K through 12 WILL NOT graduate high school. At the same time, since only 33 % of Mississippi students graduate “college ready”, we can anticipate that if student outcomes do not improve that approximately 198,200, or 67 %, of the 295,800 students that will eventually graduate high school will NOT be sufficiently prepared to undertake the minimum requirements of a 4-year college or university. So – if we combine those who drop out between K and 12 with those who graduate “not college ready”, then we can anticipate that approximately 395,400 of the



approximately 493,000 students now attending K-12 in Mississippi public schools eventually will leave the school system NOT “college ready”. Conversely, only approximately 97,600 of the 493,000 public school students now in K-12 WILL graduate “college ready”.

### **Consequences for Mississippi’s children and families, and for the general welfare of the community**

- Children that do not graduate high school have very poor employment prospects in our evolving economy.
- Persons with a 4-year college degree, according to the data:
  - a) earn substantially more income than a person without one, or a person with a 2-year degree from a community or junior college;
  - b) are better prepared financially to support a family,
  - c) are more engaged in the civic, cultural and social life of the community;
  - d) pay more taxes to support public education and other necessary government functions, and
  - e) are much less likely to need government assistance programs.
- Children that do not graduate high school often wind up on the streets unemployed, without financial resources to sustain themselves or a family, few meaningful programs to assist them, and nothing purposeful to do.
- This is a prescription for our children “getting into trouble” rather than becoming productive, engaged citizens. It costs between 7 and 10 times more to incarcerate a young person than to educate a young person. Education is the best path to safer communities.
- Under-education of our children is also a prescription for maintaining some of the highest poverty, poorest health, and lowest birth weight rates in the nation. Persons with less education and less wealth are less likely to take advantage of medical services, cannot afford necessary medical services or medication, and have higher incidence of disease and lower life expectancy.
- In our evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, low graduation rates, low college-readiness rates, and a poorly trained workforce without the skills needed in

our evolving economy makes Mississippi less competitive for the attraction of investment capital and new job opportunities to Mississippi.

- Low graduation rates and poor preparation for college in Mississippi makes it exceedingly difficult to develop a new pool of students who become qualified first-rate home-grown teachers and administrators to replace our teachers and administrators (who cannot be expected to go on forever) that retire or otherwise leave Mississippi school systems. It also means a smaller pool of students that can become scientists, mathematicians, medical professionals, researchers and specialists, entrepreneurs, public officials, and accountable and effective community leaders.

### **Full Funding of Public Education is of the highest priority**

Full funding for public education is not an ordinary priority. It is of the highest priority because it affects every other aspect of our society. Quality education accessible to all children regardless of race, class, status, special need or location of residence is the keystone central to the foundation of a healthy and just society. Failure to provide sufficient funding for public education is the wrong path because it undermines everything else that we are trying to accomplish as a healthy and just society.

Effective education requires sufficient funding. Sufficient funding requires understanding and commitment that undergirds the political will to set priorities consistent with the degree of need. Government, whether federal, state or local, is charged with the responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of the people. The quality of public education affects public health, community safety, and the capacity of individuals and families to cope with the burdens and stresses of an evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century culture.

The full funding formula of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program is not a pie-in-the-sky luxury framework. It was originally adopted in 1997 after careful deliberation by the State Legislature. The experts retained by the State to assist in the construction of the MAEP formula acknowledged that when fully funded the formula does not provide all that local school districts need to provide the quality of education that children need. Rather, the formula is based on what a

moderately successful Mississippi school appears to need when certain specific criteria are addressed. Some criteria were not addressed in the construction of the formula on the basis of need, but as a political compromise: such as the gross under-funding for children-at-risk, children with special needs, and new school building and facilities.

## **Money Matters:**

### **Under-funding of education correlates with under-preparation of students**

The research-based evidence is that there is a direct correlation between the availability of education resources and student performance on standardized tests. Money, and other key resources, matter.

- Students tend to perform better on standardized tests and are better prepared for college when their schools have more funds per pupil to spend on educating students. Schools that have fewer resources tend to have lower achieving students than schools with more resources.
- Students tend to perform better on standardized tests and are better prepared for college when their classes are taught by qualified teachers licensed to teach the subject area in which they are teaching. Students that have more unqualified teachers tend to have lower achievement on standardized tests than students with fewer unqualified teachers.
- Black children generally are disproportionately represented among the students in poverty that attend public schools, their families have higher unemployment and less educational background, and these children are disproportionately represented among lower and lowest achieving students and under-represented among high and higher achieving students. This is a consequence of the history of 2<sup>nd</sup> class segregated public education that was enforced for too long as a matter of state and local policy, and, if for no other reason, the state has a primary responsibility to remedy the conditions it had been so committed to create and enforce.

## **The dilemma of the Mississippi State Budget: Show me the money!**

Every year the battle at the state legislature is how to set priorities for the allocation of the **General Fund**, which is approximately 4 (four) billion dollars in recent years. Very few persons actually understand this process, including state legislators and state officials. A handful of persons do understand it and everyone else depends on them to reassure them that what they are doing is the best that can be done under the circumstances.

Did you know that the state actually spends approximately 13 (thirteen) billion dollars each year? We didn't. Now we do and we are going to try to get a better understanding of how the process works, including how priorities are set for the use of these dollars. It turns out that an additional 8 to 9 billion dollars are segregated in two other funds: **Special State Fund** and **Federal Fund**. Each year approximately 8 to 9 billion dollars of state revenue in the Special State Fund and the Federal Fund, as a matter of policy, are diverted before they can get to the General Fund. So every year 8 to 9 billion dollars in state revenue are not included in the annual *public* battle over how best to spend state revenues. That process tends only to address the approximately 4 billion dollars in the **General Fund**.

Make no mistake about it: there is a whole lot of turf at stake, and enormous bureaucratic inertia and stakeholder interests exist to hold this part of the budget in its existing orbit. This is not to suggest, at this point, that the expenditures are not for appropriate and necessary purposes. But it is to say that these funds are not part of the annual setting of priorities that we associate with the battle over the allocation of state resources in the General Fund.

Some *portion* of the 8 to 9 billion dollars might be better spent, at least for a period of time, on creating a quality public education accessible to all children, and ensuring that all of our citizens, especially the children, the elderly and those with limited resources, receive the health care to which they ought to be entitled in a fair and just society. For the most part, our elected representatives have little to say, and say little, about the 8 to 9 billion dollars allocated outside of the **General Fund**. It is difficult to challenge what exists and propose meaningful alternatives when we understand so little about this process and how it works.

As citizens we have a right to participate in the process of setting these priorities. But if we do not understand this process, we cannot participate meaningfully or effectively. If we neither understand nor exercise our rights, it is the same as not having those rights.

So – we are committed to obtaining an effective understanding of how this process works. Hopefully, through this learning we can come to understand how best to generate the revenue needed to create a quality, first-class public education accessible to all children, regardless of race, class, special need, location or status.

## **Justice Funding:**

### **Experimenting with language to clarify policy and strategy choices for public education**

The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 represented a major turning point in the seventy-five year struggle to end formal, legalized racial segregation throughout the United States. Thurgood Marshall was one of the lead attorneys for the black children and families who had the courage to put themselves in harm's way on behalf of their communities to bring an end to segregation in the public schools. Later, during the 1960s, Marshall became the first black Justice on the US Supreme Court.

In *Brown* the Court tried to create a new set of values to guide the nation. The Court's choice of language described where we were and where we needed to go. What the Court said and did not say had an extraordinary impact on the issues of race that faced the nation.<sup>1</sup>

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court announced its decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," the Court ruled unanimously, declaring that they violated the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. It thus overturned the doctrine of "separate but equal," which been the law of the land since 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was decided. The *Brown* ruling – the culmination of a decades-long effort by the N.A.A.C.P. – has today acquired an aura of inevitability. But it didn't seem inevitable at the time....

Thurgood Marshall, a principal architect of the litigation strategy that led to *Brown*, recalled, "I was so happy I was numb." He predicted that school segregation would be entirely stamped out within five years....

A quiz: In 1960, on the sixth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, how many of the 1.4 million African-American children in the Deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina attended racially mixed schools? Answer: Zero. Even in 1964, a decade after *Brown*, more than ninety-eight per cent of African-American children in the South attended segregated schools....

... In the 1954 decision, the Court declined to specify the appropriate remedy for school segregation, asking instead for further arguments about it. The following year, in an opinion known as *Brown v. Board of Education II*, the Court declared that the transition to integration must occur "with all deliberate speed." Perhaps fearing that an order immediate desegregation would result in school closings and violence, the justices held that lower-court judges could certainly consider administrative problems; delays would be

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<sup>1</sup> Sunstein, Cass R., *Did Brown Matter?*, The New Yorker, May 3, 2004, 102-106.

acceptable. As Marshall later told the legal historian Dennis Hutchinson, “In 1954, I was delirious. What a victory! I thought I was the smartest lawyer in the entire world. In 1955 I was shattered. They gave us *nothing* and then told us to work for it. I thought I was the dumbest Negro in the United States.” As a Supreme Court justice, Marshall – for whom I clerked in 1980 – liked to say, “I’ve finally figured out what ‘all deliberate speed’ means. It means ‘*slow*.’”

So – the Court said that segregated schools were unconstitutional. But the court also said that school districts did not have to desegregate immediately. They could take their time. They could find reasons not to move quickly, or perhaps at all. The Court was clear that the children had rights, but was reluctant to ensure that they had remedies to protect and enforce such rights.<sup>2</sup> The Court could have made a clear and unequivocal statement that school districts had to do the right thing without further delay. That would have thrown the full weight of the federal government behind the constitutional rights of the children. Instead, the court left it up to the combatants at the local school district level where the local districts had the advantage, often supported by corrupt, racist federal judges who had no reluctance to flaunt and attack the Supreme Court and the United States Constitution.

The phrase “with all deliberate speed” was not the bridge to a new beginning, but the barrier that blocked passage. The Court’s language that was supposed to express and synthesize the complex path to fundamental change, at the school district level became a mocking, sarcastic characterization of how best to preserve the *status quo*.

Language is the key to effective communication. At every stage of struggle a battle arises over control of the language that is used to shape the understanding that people have as to what the goals of the struggle ought to be, and how best to achieve these goals. One key piece in the unfolding fabric of language is the deployment of words intended to synthesize and simplify discussion of complex ideas, and which are intended to become a *shorthand*. Shorthand can be used to illuminate or obscure the discussion, depending on the circumstances and the motivation behind its use. Therefore, it is very important to make sure that we

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<sup>2</sup> The Court tried to duck one of the first principles of American law. In *Marbury v. Madison*, decided in 1803, the Court said, “...Where there is a right, there is a remedy.” The Court also said that not even the King [and in the United States that means *not even the government*] is above the law.

understand the complexity that underlies the shorthand references used during battle.

Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, academic studies reach the conclusion that public schools in the nation, especially in the south, remain substantially segregated by race. In addition, there is great consternation that the public schools fail to deliver a quality, first-rate education, and that this problem is particularly acute in schools that are substantially or majority students of color.

At present, in the struggle to improve schools to the extent that they are able to deliver a quality, first-rate education, two principal *concepts* have emerged that are used by academics, educators, activists, legislators, and judges to characterize their reform goals: *educational adequacy* and *educational equity*.

At the same time, Southern Echo wants to put another concept on the table for discussion: *justice funding*. Southern Echo is experimenting with the *justice funding* concept in order to ensure that the discussion of how to provide a quality, first-rate education to all children in states like Mississippi includes the necessary and appropriate references to the historical context, policy development and decision-making at the state and local school district levels, and the delivery of education at the school district level.

**Educational Adequacy:** The concept of “educational adequacy” is rooted in a two-step process:

1. Determine the educational needs of students and schools; then
2. Match sufficient state and local funding with those needs.

**Educational Equity:** The concept of “educational equity” is rooted in two primary ideas:

1. That all students in the public school system, regardless of where they reside or the wealth of their families, should be treated equally; and
2. That each student should receive the same education regardless of the tax base of the school district, or the willingness of public officials to raise through taxation the resources needed, or the willingness of public officials to spend money, to provide the same, or equal, education to all children.



“Educational equity” is not defined by a single rubric or frame. Some equity supporters take a more narrow view that equity is achieved when the resources allocated per students are the essentially equivalent across all the school districts in the state. Other equity advocates take a more complex view that equity means students are provided an education that addresses their disparate needs in order to achieve an equal education outcome. In this analysis, for example, students at-risk or with special needs, receive an enhanced level of resources to ensure that they receive the education to which they are entitled.

**Justice Funding:** The concept of “justice funding” which we are in the process of developing is rooted in the following framework:

1. That the deprivation of and discrimination within public education for children of color and low-wealth has been a matter of intentional, official state and local policies;
2. Therefore, the state has a duty and responsibility, morally and legally, to eliminate the impact of past deprivations and discrimination that have resulted from intentional, official state and local policies;
3. Therefore, the state and local school districts have a joint duty and responsibility to level the playing field for all children of low-wealth and color by providing all necessary and appropriate funds, resources, programs and support services to eliminate the impact of past deprivations and discrimination;
4. That the standard for evaluation and assessment of whether past deprivation and discrimination has been effectively eliminated must be based on *actual outcomes* for students, as opposed to good intentions;
5. That the standard for *outcomes*, while the playing field is being leveled and thereafter, must be based on delivering to all public school students a quality, first-rate education, and quality, first-rate support services, rather than the minimum education that may be defined in existing state constitutions, or as limited by the current willingness of legislators to support public education; and

6. That the issue is not whether every child can achieve at the same level, but that every child receives the quality of education and support services that enable each child to realize his or her capacity and to achieve up the level of which they are capable.

Southern Echo is concerned that “educational adequacy” needs to be understood in terms of “educational quality”. For that reason we think that it would be appropriate to substitute *quality education* for “adequate” education. In our experience, the parents in our communities, for the most part, do *not* talk about “adequate education”, but rather talk about “quality education” for their children.

In our experience poor communities and communities of color often perceive the word “adequate” as demeaning, rather than validating, their value. Their premise is that “adequate” refers to something somewhat better than we had before (where everyone agrees that what we had was less than, and often considerably less than, “adequate”) and that we should be happy with “adequate” and not complain about it. “Adequacy” should be defined in terms of outcome: that is, students should be enabled to meet challenging goals en route to obtaining a *quality, first-rate public education* and the goals should not be defined in terms of a “minimum education.”

“Quality” needs to be understood in terms of the impact or outcomes of the education needed by low-wealth, rural communities *in light of the history and culture of those communities* in which the educational process is being delivered. This may differ from one area of the country to another. But, this is especially important to us in Mississippi, where as a matter of formal state and local education policy throughout its history, the state and local school districts have sought to minimize and depress the level of education for students of low-wealth and or color.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding our “history” is no small matter. History is not simply a pile of recollected facts, but in its essence is a rendering of the culture of the community as

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<sup>3</sup> The unfortunate historical irony is that the education of white children, both of higher and lower wealth, has suffered immensely as a consequence of the education policies pursued at the state and local school district levels that were designed to minimize public education for black children. The fight to create a quality public education that is accessible to all children, regardless of race and class, ultimately will be a direct benefit to white children, as well as children of color. Once both communities, at both the state and local levels, recognize this common ground they will have a capacity together to impact education policy in a positive way that will be unprecedented in the history of the state.

a living and organic process. Education policy in Mississippi was consciously designed to support and perpetuate a disparity in education between blacks and whites in order to vindicate the first-principles of racism that black children:

- must internalize “the premise of inferiority”,
- must learn “to stay in their place”,
- must accept “second-class” citizenship and status,
- must be exposed only to second-rate educational and vocational skills and tools,
- must be denied the development of critical thinking skills, and
- must be taught never to aspire to compete with whites in the political, economic or academic spheres.

This cultural phenomenon is deeply rooted in both the black and white communities and has been reinforced through a history of fear in both communities rooted in public and private terror and intimidation. Digging it out, excavating it, is proving to be an extraordinary undertaking in the face of creative, flexible and determined resistance from within the white community. The struggle is now further complicated by the evolution within the white community of a new generation of white public officials and business leaders who are more than willing to say all the politically correct things about race and education, while pursuing education policies and budget strategies that continue to thwart the development of a quality, first-rate education for children of color that also adversely impacts children of low-wealth.

We start from a premise that there has been, and continues to be, a substantial disparity in both the educational outcomes and the educational opportunities accorded to black and white children in Mississippi. If we freeze the playing field and thereafter only give to all students the “same”, then the disparity is preserved. Ending the disparity in *educational outcomes*, as prescribed in point #6 at p. 15 above, (rather than merely providing “educational opportunities”) is a valid goal, notwithstanding that it flies in the face of the first principles, and on-the-ground strategies, of those fighting to maintain the foundations of racism. “Equal education”, in the current historical context is not a particularly clarifying or useful concept. It has become a rubric (a legalistic one, if you will) for the limitation of the

scope of remedies for past discrimination and current deprivations. “Fairness” and “justice”, as we define those terms, are more expansive as moral foundations for the construction of education policy at the state and local school district levels.

Off into the future (perhaps a long way off), if and when the essential educational disparities between communities of color and white communities, between low-wealth and high wealth communities, have been overcome, then the concept of “equal education” may become useful again. Our conceptions of “fairness” and “justice” require that education policies, including the funding of education, be adopted and implemented with the objective and in a manner to *eliminate* the disparity. Now that’s an *outcome*.

It is in this respect that Southern Echo has a core problem with the concepts of “equitable” and “adequate.” Echo finds these concepts useful *only* if they include within their meaning that it is necessary to remedy the impact of past deprivations so that “catch up and keep up” is real, not illusory. The problem with “adequacy” as a matter of policy touches the core question for stakeholders: For what purpose are we educating children? Historically, the Mississippi establishment has sought to educate black students to become workers for white business owners. At the same time, however, white children of the middle and upper classes have been targeted to become entrepreneurs and community leaders in every facet of the culture.

So – “adequate” has always meant different things to different communities *at the same time* – depending on the status of the child -- in a society still substantially segregated in terms of the delivery of education. Therefore, there needs to be a clarification of terminology that focuses the challenge for policymakers in terms of providing “quality, first-rate education” to all students as a foundation for fulfilling justice and promoting democracy. We do not need working concepts that have the effect of sustaining existing disparities rooted in competing racial, class and gender interests.

A similar concept, “sufficient” (as in sufficient resources, sufficient curriculum, etc.) brings us to the same kind of crossroads in policy terms. It depends on what is meant by “sufficient.” Often, this is where people fall apart depending on whether they mean “only the minimum required by existing law” or they mean, “whatever it takes to remedy past deprivations.” The differences among

competing interests on this point will be as small or large as the differences in their underlying agendas. People tend to hear and see reality, and then analyze the implications, from the special perspective that their underlying agenda tends to require. That is why it is essential to understand the context when people use such terms as “sufficient”, “adequate”, “equitable”, “fair” and “just” to describe goals and policies.

If conceptual clarity is not achieved up front, it can get very rough when it comes time to make complex policy decisions that implicate the underlying agenda. Unfortunately, that is why many policy makers, especially in the education field, prefer to have only people in the room who already agree on *their* vision and purpose of education when it comes to making policy decisions. It’s a lot easier to do business when you do not have to negotiate the underlying agenda *before* you can decide on which policies to use to implement the agenda. But it is also inherently less democratic.

When shorthand terminology or concepts are being used, without clarity on the underlying agenda or long-term goals, misunderstanding and miscalculation can result among people who have thought all along that they are working toward the same ends. Allies may come to understand, for example, that they are not traveling the same path when a string of tough decisions or policy choices have to be made on which the allies become increasingly aware that they do not agree. Unfortunately, at this point the allies are often heavily invested politically and emotionally in the strategies and program of work, and may ultimately wind up blaming each other for the misunderstanding and miscalculation. This can result in bitter disappointment and harsh recrimination among allies about abandonment and betrayal when the chips are down. This can impair future communications and undermine the possibility of finding common ground as a basis for working together in the future. Ultimately, this may weaken the capacity of the community to bring about needed change in education policy. Stated differently, it may be more helpful in the long run to go into battle understanding what constitutes the common ground among allies, and the areas of disagreement, than it is to discover the significant differences in the heat of battle.

The values set forth in the concept of *justice funding* for which we are fighting should not be compromised. This concept needs to be further developed, refined and improved through extensive discussions and negotiations within communities of color and low-wealth. But, we do not accept that the ultimate vision of *justice funding* is *negotiable*, in the sense of settling for less under pressure from those portions of the entire community that have historically fought tooth and nail to deny an effective, quality education for students of color and students of low-wealth. This is not arrogance, nor is it impractical. Only in this way can communities of color and low-wealth set a standard of value against which all policy developments can be measured and tested to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. We recognize that as a matter of day-to-day politics that we will need to negotiate policies with the entire community and that we will not get all at once everything that we need to have. But our ultimate goals that guide our strategies should not be compromised. Only the day-to-day policy choices that are adopted and implemented in the course of our fight are subject to compromise, based on the degree of capacity that we have at the time to impact policy.

As the African proverb says, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there!” The white establishment has been in control of education policy, such as it has existed, for 400 years. They have fought hard to retain all control and they have declined to share it voluntarily. So they can take full responsibility for the problems and dilemmas they created and which now confound those who seek to create a quality, first-rate education for all children.

It is for these reasons that we want to lift up and experiment with the concept of “justice funding” as a means through which to clarify our goals as a foundation for our policy choices.

### Some suggested reading:

There is an extraordinary amount of published materials, including books, research papers, articles, etc. We have found the following books especially useful:

Crespino, Joseph, *In Search of Another Country – Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*, Princeton University Press, 2007

Lassiter, Matthew D., *The Silent Majority – Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Princeton University Press, 2006

Kruse, Kevin M., *White Flight – Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, Princeton University Press, 2005

Bolton, Charles C., *The Hardest Deal of All – The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870 – 1940*, University Press of Mississippi, 2005

Moye, J. Todd, *Let the People Decide – Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986*, University of North Carolina Press, 2004

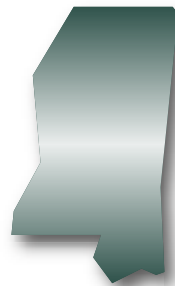
McMillen, Neil R., *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow, 1890-1940*, University of Illinois Press, 1989

Anderson, James D., *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1988

Kluger, Richard, *Simple Justice, The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, First Vintage Books Edition, 2004

Five puzzle pieces are scattered around the title text. Two are at the top left, one is to the left of the title, and two are at the bottom left. They have various patterns including camouflage, wood grain, and abstract colors.

# Putting the Pieces Together: A Taxpayer's Guide to the Mississippi Budget



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## About the Mississippi Economic Policy Center

The Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) engages in rigorous, accessible and timely analysis to inform the policy debate on issues that affect the economic and social well-being of working families and low-wealth Mississippians. An independent, nonpartisan initiative, MEPC is managed by the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD), a regional financial institution and community development intermediary dedicated to strengthening communities, building assets and improving lives in economically distressed areas in the Mid South. Key MEPC partners include the Mississippi Center for Justice and other organizations that contribute expertise and otherwise provide important guidance and support.

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Sara Miller, Rebecca Dixon, Edward Sivak and Mary Elizabeth Evans, *Putting the Pieces Together: A Taxpayer's Guide to the Mississippi Budget*, Jackson, MS: Mississippi Economic Policy Center, 2007.

To download a copy of *Putting the Pieces Together*, go to [www.mepconline.org](http://www.mepconline.org). To acquire a hard copy of the report, or for other information, contact:

Mississippi Economic Policy Center  
4 Old River Place, Suite A  
Jackson, MS 39202  
(601) 944-1100



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We would also like to acknowledge Alabama Arise, the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Texas and the New Jersey Public Policy Perspective. Each of these groups has published budget and tax primers that the MEPC used to structure this piece.

The MEPC would also like to thank the Legislative Budget Office, the Mississippi State Tax Commission and the Library Commission for their data, guidance and assistance.



# Executive Summary

Budget decisions directly influence the quality of education that our children receive, the condition of the roads that we travel, the safety of our communities and the level of trust we can place in professionals such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses. Of course, each of these services – education, road maintenance and public safety – has a price tag and must be paid for through taxes, fees or borrowed funds. Strong fiscal systems are needed to ensure that the funds are available – in a good economy and in a slow economy – to cover the costs of the services that Mississippi residents depend on everyday.

For Fiscal Year 2008, Mississippi appropriated \$17.4 billion. Nearly half of the appropriated funds came from federal sources (48%) and half from revenue generated from state taxes and fees (52%). To arrive at the funding decisions, important decisions were made to determine how the funds would be spent – and how the funds would be raised to pay for state services. “Putting the Pieces Together” serves as a guide to Mississippi’s budget and tax systems. Divided into five chapters, the guide provides information on:

- The budget process;
- State spending decisions made during the 2007 legislative session;
- How the state generates revenue through taxes, fees and the federal government;
- How to evaluate Mississippi’s tax system; and
- How to get involved in the budget and tax process.

The goals of the report are to increase understanding of the state budget process and to encourage participation in the process for years to come.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 raises the question – why is the state budget important? The budget is important because millions of Mississippians rely on state funded services everyday.

Through state government:

- Over 10,000 miles of roads and bridges are maintained;
- More than 700,000 children are immunized;
- More than 8,000 physicians and 47,000 nurses are licensed by state boards;
- Over 300,000 students are educated by the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges; and
- Nearly 500,000 students are educated through the state’s network of public schools.

## Chapter 2: The Budget Process

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Budget Appropriations Process, through which the state legislature and executive branch work to identify the state’s needs and designate money to fund state services in the next fiscal year. Some key points about the budget process include:

- State services are funded through three primary sources:
  - General Fund dollars raised largely through state income and sales taxes;
  - State source Special Funds raised through fees and special taxes; and
  - Federal source Special Funds sent to the state and earmarked to fund specific programs.
- Leading up to the legislative session, the following entities inform the budget making process:
  - Joint Legislative Budget Committee – hears agency requests in September and submits a budget recommendation to the legislature in December;

- Revenue Estimating Committee – examines economic trends and estimates the amount of revenue that the state will collect in the next fiscal year; and
- Office of the Governor – submits a budget recommendation to the legislature by November 15.

- All budget recommendations and the final enacted budget must be balanced, and expenditures cannot exceed 98% of the state’s projected revenue without further legislative action.

## Chapter 3: A Detailed Look at State Spending

The third chapter highlights the budget decisions made for FY 2008 and examines some trends in state spending. Some of the highlights include:

- The Mississippi Legislature appropriated \$17.4 billion for FY 2008;
- Federal funds accounted for 48% of all the appropriations;
- Most of the appropriations (75%) were for agriculture and economic development, colleges and universities, highways, K-12 education and Medicaid;
- Different state services are funded through different sources. For example:
  - The majority of services funded through Medicaid are funded with federal dollars;
  - Higher and K-12 education are primarily funded through Mississippi tax revenues; and
- Over the last 10 years, state spending has remained stable – increases or decreases in spending have been in line with the state’s economy.

## Chapter 4:

### A Detailed Look at State Revenue

In order to make government work, the state collects revenue from residents and businesses in the form of taxes, fees and funds received from the federal government. Chapter 4 shows how the state generates its revenue. Some key points about state revenue include:

- In FY 2006, Mississippi collected \$13.8 billion in revenue generated mostly through state taxes and federal funds;
- In FY 2006, most (54%) of Mississippi's state tax revenue came from sales and use tax collections – an amount of \$3,074,831,000;
  - Mississippi ranked 7th in the country in the amount of sales taxes paid per resident (\$1,047) in FY 2006;
- Mississippi collected \$1,213,733,000 in personal income taxes – about 21% of its state tax revenues in FY 2006;
  - Mississippi ranked 41st out of 43 states in the amount of income taxes paid per person;
- Mississippi receives a large share of its annual revenue from federal funds – about 50% in FY 2006; and
  - Over the last ten years, the share of federal revenues as a percent of all Mississippi revenues has risen from 38.6% in 1996 to 49.9% in 2006.

## Chapter 5:

### Evaluating Mississippi's Tax System

Chapter 5 introduces some key concepts to be used when evaluating a state tax system and examines the key characteristics of Mississippi's set of taxes. Specifically:

- Healthy tax systems generate enough revenue to pay for services, provide for a fair way of collecting taxes based on one's ability to pay and exhibit a high degree of transparency;
- Mississippi's tax system is regressive –
  - The top 20% of income earners (who earn an average of \$103,400) pay the lowest percentage of their income towards state and local taxes, paying an estimated 7% of their income. The bottom 40% of earners pay the highest percentage of their income towards state and local taxes. The bottom 20% of earners (who earn an average of \$7,000) pay 10% of their income in state and local taxes, and the next 20% of earners (with average earnings of \$15,100) pay 11.5% of their income.
  - Sales taxes are regressive because low-income working families pay a higher proportion of their income on taxes than people with higher incomes; Mississippi relies heavily on the sales tax to generate revenue;
  - Mississippi's sales tax is more regressive than in other states because it taxes groceries – an item that low-income working families cannot avoid purchasing;
  - While mildly progressive, Mississippi's personal income tax functions more like a flat tax – people earning \$30,000 a year are in the same tax bracket as people earning \$250,000 a year; and
  - Working families with wages below the federal poverty line are subject to the state income tax.

## Chapter 6:

### Putting the Pieces Together:

#### How Mississippians Can Get Involved

While the Legislature and the Governor make and approve spending decisions, residents can play an important role in the processes for developing the budget and informing Mississippi's set of taxes. Some ways to get involved include:

- Keep Current – Reading the newspaper and watching the news with an eye towards stories and editorials on state spending and taxes is a good first step;
- Enhance Your Knowledge – If a news story catches one's interest, there are several places to gather additional information on budget and tax topics, including publications released by the Center for Policy Research and Planning at the Institutions for Higher Learning and the Mississippi Economic Policy Center; and
- Engage Others – Connect with other people and organizations engaged in budget and tax work. There are multiple nonprofit organizations in Jackson and around the state that can provide updates on key people, events and votes. The nonprofits can also provide avenues to participate in the process.

This guide provides an overview of Mississippi's budget and tax systems. Given the importance of strong fiscal systems and the funding of vital state services, it is important to understand how the system functions and to ensure that it is efficient and effective.



# CHAPTER 1 – Introduction



## Why is the State Budget Important?

Every family has a budget. Each month a family brings in a certain amount of income, and each month a family must decide how to spend the money. Some expenses are absolutely necessary — like food, shelter and utilities. Other expenses are much more flexible — like entertainment. During tight months, families face tough decisions about whether cuts in “flexible” expenses must be made. Regardless of whether or not a family uses a formal budget document, each family must plan and account for its needs, often with an income that can’t pay for everything.

The state of Mississippi is no different. It brings money into the state bank account (the Treasury), and the Legislature and the Governor decide how the money will be spent. Just as families must make difficult spending decisions, lawmakers face the same challenge. How does the state fund all the needs and wants of Mississippi residents with limited resources?

While the concept of the Mississippi budget is theoretically similar to that of a family budget, in practice the Mississippi budget can be more puzzling. There are many stages in the state budgeting process, many players that affect the outcome of budget debates, and many sources of revenue — to name just a few complexities. At the end of the day, however, the Mississippi budget provides a blueprint for how the

state government funds services for millions of residents.

Since the state gets its money from the people and is responsible for providing services with that money, the state should be accountable to the people. The state’s budget should reflect their priorities, wishes, and needs.

Budget decisions directly influence the quality of education that our children receive, the condition of the roads that we travel, the safety of our communities and the level of trust we can place in professionals such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses.

### Importance of the State Budget

- Nearly 500,000 students are educated through the state’s network of public schools<sup>1</sup>
- More than 300,000 students are educated through the state’s community college system<sup>2</sup>
- Over 10,000 miles of roads and bridges in all 82 counties are maintained (more miles of road than the distance from Jackson, MS to Melbourne, Australia)<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 700,000 individuals receive health insurance coverage<sup>4</sup>
- More than 700,000 infants, children and adults are immunized<sup>5</sup>
- More than 7,000 law enforcement officers are supported in local communities<sup>6</sup>
- More than 24,000 inmates are housed in the state’s correctional system<sup>7</sup>
- More than 8,000 physicians, 3,000 pharmacists, 1,400 dentists, and 47,000 nurses are licensed by state boards<sup>8</sup>

Of course, each of these services — education, road maintenance and public health and safety — has a price tag and must be paid for through taxes, fees or borrowed funds. Strong fiscal systems are needed to ensure that the funds are available — in a good economy or in a slow economy — to cover the costs of the services that Mississippi residents depend on every day.

This report provides a simple overview of how the Mississippi budget is created, how the state spends its money, how it generates revenue, and ways you can get involved in the budget process. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on how the state spends or appropriates its funds. Chapter 4 provides an overview of how the state raises revenue to pay for state services funded by appropriations. In providing a simple overview, the goals of the report are to raise understanding of the state budget process and, we hope, to encourage participation in the budget process in the years to come.

<sup>1</sup> Mississippi Department of Education *2005-2006 Enrollment and Average Daily Attendance Public Schools Report*

<sup>2</sup> State Board for Community and Junior Colleges *Mississippi Public Community and Junior Colleges Statistical Data 2004-2005*

<sup>3</sup> Joint Legislative Budget Committee *State of Mississippi FY 2007 Joint Legislative Budget Report*, Department of Transportation’s agency description

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Governor Division of Medicaid *FY 2006 Annual Report Summary*, Children’s Health Insurance Program beneficiaries and Medicaid beneficiaries

<sup>5</sup> Mississippi Department of Health Information Desk webpage [http://www.msdl.state.ms.us/msdhsite/\\_static/4,0,204.html](http://www.msdl.state.ms.us/msdhsite/_static/4,0,204.html)

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Justice *DEA Briefs and Background State Fact Sheets, Mississippi 2005*

<sup>7</sup> Mississippi Department of Corrections *2006 Annual Report*

<sup>8</sup> Mississippi Board of Nursing *2006 Annual Report*; Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure website *Table 1: Physicians Licensed*; Mississippi Board of Pharmacy website *Board Statistics*; Mississippi State Board of Dental Examiners *The Dental Digest* June 2005

# The Budget Process



## What is the State Budget?

The state budget is the collection of laws, passed each year, that determine how the state collects and spends resources. It includes spending decisions for every service the state provides, and revenue decisions affecting every state resident.

A law allowing the state to spend money is called an appropriation. State appropriations pay for state services like education, criminal justice, and public health. Appropriations are distributed among state agencies with responsibilities for various services. For example, appropriations for education are allocated to the Department of Education, and appropriations for highway construction are allocated to the Department of Transportation.

For Fiscal Year 2008, the Legislature appropriated \$17.4 billion.<sup>9</sup> This money comprises three kinds of funds:

- **General Funds**
- **Special Funds**
- **Federal Funds**



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## General Funds

General funds come from general state tax collections and pay for many key services provided by the state, including K-12 education, colleges and universities, and corrections. The Legislature has significant discretion about how these funds are spent. During strong economic times, the Legislature may use general funds to cover costs associated with new or expanded programs. During weak economic times, general fund appropriations could be cut or held steady to achieve a balanced budget. When the Legislature meets in January, the budget debates that appear in the news mostly revolve around these appropriations.

## Special Funds

Special funds are established through state statute or constitutional provision that earmarks the funds for a specific purpose. Like general funds, they must be appropriated annually, but they are not generally subjected to the same level of debate.

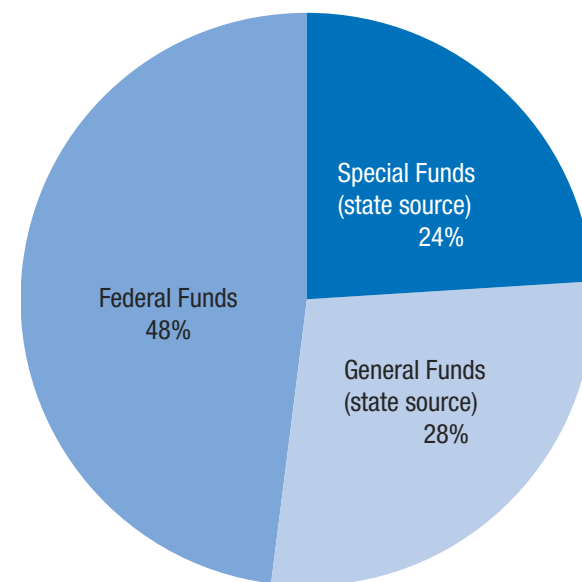
Some special funds are supported by fees, fines or assessments. Others can be funded through special taxes. For example, regulatory/licensing agencies charge licensing fees and assess fines which go to support their operation. The Medical Licensure Board and the Board of Dental Examiners are two agencies that receive funding through licensing fees. The Department of Transportation is an example of a special fund agency that derives some of its funding through a tax on fuel. Many special fund agencies, like the Medical Licensure Board, receive all of their funding from special funds.<sup>10</sup> Some other agencies, like the Department of Human Services, receive funding from a combination of special funds, general funds, and/or federal funds.

## Federal Funds

Federal funds are earmarked by the U.S. government for specific state programs. They are appropriated annually by the Mississippi Legislature, but they must be spent in keeping with federal rules. Depending on the federal rules associated with each program, the Legislature may have more or less flexibility in how the funds are spent.

Figure 1 breaks out state appropriations by fund type. The appropriations for FY 2008 included \$4.9 billion in general funds, \$4.2 billion in state-funded special funds, and \$8.3 billion in federally-funded special funds.

**Figure 1:**  
**Total Appropriations**  
**(\$17.4 Billion) in State**  
**and Federal Funds FY 2008**



Source: Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee State of Mississippi Budget Fiscal Year 2008

<sup>9</sup> Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee *State of Mississippi Budget Fiscal Year 2008*

<sup>10</sup> A complete list of Special Fund Agencies can be found in the most recent enacted state budget available on the website for the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration: <http://www.dfa.state.ms.us/fy2008appropriations.pdf>

# How is the State's Budget Created?

Each year, Mississippi's legislature comes together to make decisions about how the billions of dollars in state funds will be spent in the upcoming **fiscal year**. This process is called the **budget appropriation process**. Figure 2 illustrates the steps in the timeline of the budget process.

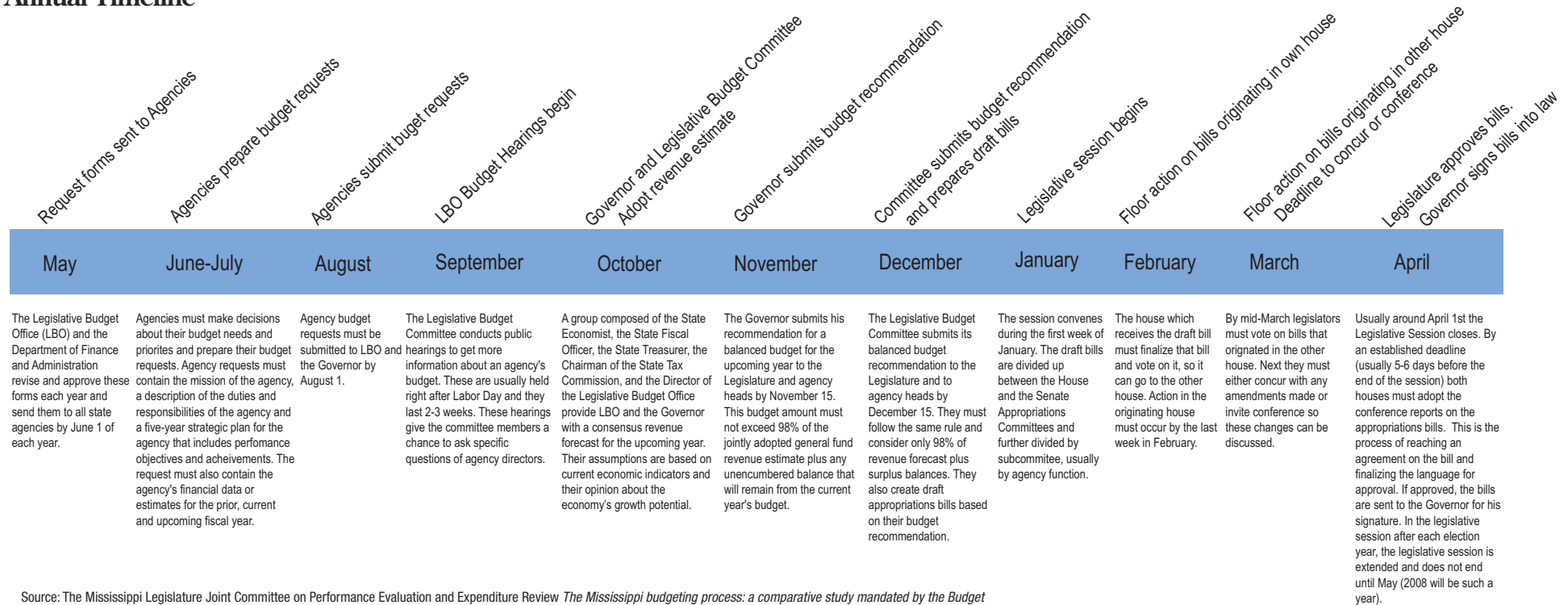
## Key Terms

**Fiscal Year (FY)** – The yearly accounting period for which budget decisions are made. The fiscal year for the state of Mississippi extends from July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next. A fiscal year is referred to by the calendar year in which it ends. For example, FY 2007 began on July 1, 2006 and ended on June 30, 2007.

**Budget Appropriation Process** – The process through which the state legislature and executive branch work together to:

- Identify the state's needs for the upcoming year;
- Determine how much money is available; and
- Designate projected money available for the funding of state services for the next fiscal year.

**Figure 2:**  
**Mississippi State Budgeting Process**  
**Annual Timeline**



Source: The Mississippi Legislature Joint Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review *The Mississippi budgeting process: a comparative study mandated by the Budget Reform Act of 1992* and Department of Finance and Administration Appropriations and Budgets *Legislative Budget Office Budget Instructions/Forms Memorandum*, June 1, 2006.



The budget process begins with the state agencies. By August 1 of each year, each state agency sends a budget request to the Legislative Budget Office laying out how much it hopes to spend in the following fiscal year and on what. In September, the **Joint Legislative Budget Committee** conducts hearings open to the public to discuss all of the agency budget requests. In October, the **Revenue Estimating Committee** examines economic trends and develops an estimate of the amount of revenue the state will collect from existing sources in the next fiscal year. The committee submits the estimate for approval by the Governor and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.

The work of the Revenue Estimating Committee underscores one of most important attributes of the state budget process: spending can only occur to the extent that funds are available.

Based on the revenue estimate, the Governor must submit a balanced budget recommendation to the Legislature by November 15. The Joint Legislative Budget Committee must respond with its own balanced budget recommendation by December 15.<sup>11</sup> This Committee's recommendation is used as the starting point for appropriations bills when the legislative session convenes in January. The House of Representatives and the Senate spend the next few

months debating, amending and voting on these budget bills. Appropriations bills in their final form must be passed by a deadline established in the legislative calendar (usually 5 to 6 days prior to the end of the legislative session).<sup>12</sup> Upon their passage in the Legislature, the appropriations bills are sent to the Governor for signature into law.

Throughout the process, budget recommendations and eventual decisions are published in a number of key documents that are available to the public. These documents are listed in the box on the right.

As in most other states, Mississippi's budget is required to be balanced. This means the Legislature is required by state law to pass a budget with the expectation that spending will not exceed revenues for the coming fiscal year. Specifically, proposed budgets of the Governor and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee and the final enacted budget cannot exceed 98% of projected revenues in a given year. The rule can be set aside if the law is amended, as it was for FY 2006, allowing total general fund appropriations to equal 100% of projected revenues.

If, after the legislative session is over and appropriations laws have been passed, it becomes apparent that expenditures will exceed revenues — that a deficit exists — the Governor may cut state spending to bring the current year back into balance. The State Fiscal Officer, appointed by the Governor, may cut up to 5% in any manner, but any cuts above 5% of the enacted budget must be executed as a uniform percentage of all general funds.<sup>13</sup>

### Joint Legislative Budget Committee

The Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) is composed of 14 legislators, half from the Senate and half from the House of Representatives. The Committee is chaired either by the Lieutenant Governor or by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The chairmanship alternates between them on an annual basis. In the Senate, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the President Pro Tempore and the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee are standing members of the JLBC. The Lt. Governor names three additional members of the Senate to the Committee. In the House, the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee are standing members. The Speaker of the House appoints four additional members of the House to the Committee. The staff of the JLBC is called the Legislative Budget Office (LBO).

### Revenue Estimating Committee

Each year the Governor and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee must adopt an estimate of all the general funds that the state expects to receive from taxes and selected fees for the upcoming year. The estimates are developed by the Revenue Estimating Committee. This committee includes the State Economist, the State Fiscal Officer, the State Treasurer, the Chairman of the State Tax Commission, and the Director of the Legislative Budget Office. Their estimates are based on current economic indicators and their opinion about the economy's growth potential.

<sup>11</sup> In 2006, the Joint Legislative Budget Committee did not agree on a budget proposal for FY 2008. Subsequently, legislators made appropriations during the legislative session without the Committee's recommendations.

<sup>12</sup> Every fourth year, coinciding with the inauguration of an elected Governor, the regular 90-day legislative session is extended to 125 days, and the session does not end until around May 11. This is the case for the 2008 legislative session.

<sup>13</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-103-211, § 27-103-139, and §27-104-13

## Putting the Pieces Together on the Budget Process

- State services are funded through three primary sources: 1) General Fund dollars raised largely through state income and sales taxes; 2) State Source Special Fund dollars raised through fees and special taxes; and 3) Federal Fund dollars sent to the state and earmarked to fund specific programs.
- Through the Budget Appropriations Process, the Legislature determines how the state's money is spent. The process occurs throughout the year and includes steps that gather input through state agency budget requests and recommendations by the Office of the Governor.

- Budget requests and recommendations are informed by reports from the Revenue Estimating Committee, which forecasts the amount of revenue that the state will have available to pay for state services in the upcoming fiscal year.
- All of the budget recommendations and the final enacted budget must be balanced, and expenditures cannot exceed 98% of the state's projected revenue unless legislative action occurs.



## Key Budget Documents

*Agency Budget Requests:* Budget Requests are prepared by each state agency for consideration by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee. Agency requests contain the mission of the agency, a description of the duties and responsibilities of the agency, and a five-year strategic plan for the agency that includes performance objectives and achievements. The request also contains the agency's financial data for the prior and current years as well as their request for the upcoming fiscal year. Depending on its complexity, an agency's budget request can range in size from around 15 pages to several hundred pages. Agency budget requests can be viewed in print by contacting the Legislative Budget Office.

*Executive Budget Recommendation:* Prepared by the Office of Budget and Fund Management, this book gives the Governor's recommendation for a balanced budget for the upcoming year. It usually includes a letter to the Legislature that explains the Governor's

priorities for the Budget. Although in some states the Governor's budget is the basis for the budget later enacted by the Legislature, in Mississippi the Governor's budget is advisory. The FY 2008 Governor's Budget is 19 pages long. This document is available in print, and a summary of the FY 2008 Governor's Budget is available online at Governor Barbour's website at [www.governorbarbour.com](http://www.governorbarbour.com).

*The Legislative Budget Report:* Prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, this book gives the committee's recommendation for a balanced budget for the upcoming year. It is generally used as the starting point for the appropriations bills that will be debated by the Legislature in January. For each General and Special Fund agency, it includes appropriations numbers for three fiscal years: It indicates how much was spent during the most recently completed fiscal year, how much is

appropriated for the current fiscal year, and how much the agency and the committee request for the upcoming fiscal year. This format gives the reader a good picture of each agency's recent spending history. The FY 2007 Legislative Budget Report is 682 pages long. This document is available in print from the Legislative Budget Office.

*Enacted Budget Bulletin:* Prepared by the Legislative Budget Office, this book is a summary of what the Legislature appropriated to each agency during the legislative session. The appropriations listed were passed by the Legislature and have been signed into law by the Governor. The FY 2008 Enacted Budget is 24 pages long. This document is available in print from the Legislative Budget Office and online on the Department of Finance and Administration website at [www.dfa.state.ms.us](http://www.dfa.state.ms.us).

## CHAPTER 3 –

# A Detailed Look at State Spending

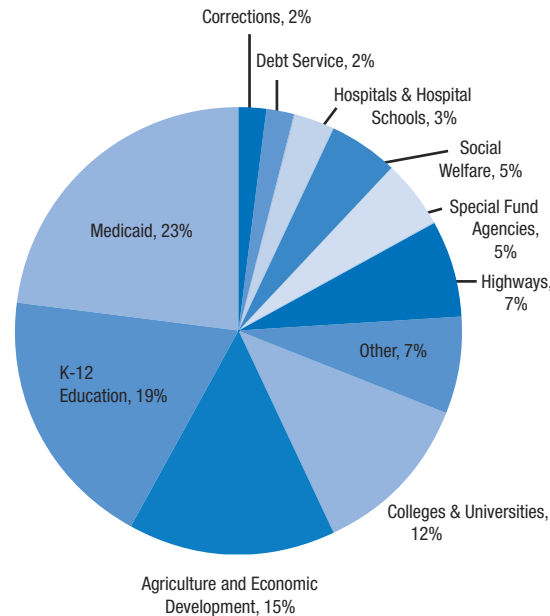


## How are State Dollars Spent?

The next piece of the budget puzzle examines the question, “How does the state spend its money?” This section provides an overview of the funding decisions the Legislature has made recently and over time.

For FY 2008, Mississippi appropriated \$17.4 billion in state and federal funds. This reflects an increase of \$3.1 billion since FY 2007, largely as a result of the availability of federal funds for hurricane recovery and rebuilding. Figure 3 illustrates how this money was distributed.

**Figure 3:**  
**Total Appropriations (\$17.4 Billion) in state and federal funds approved by the Legislature FY 2008**



Source: Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee  
*State of Mississippi Budget Fiscal Year 2008*

Of the \$17.4 billion appropriated, more than 75% was for Medicaid, K-12 education, colleges and universities, agriculture and economic development, and highways. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the total funding for these five largest categories came from federal sources. Over three-quarters of the appropriations for the largest category, Medicaid, came from federal sources.

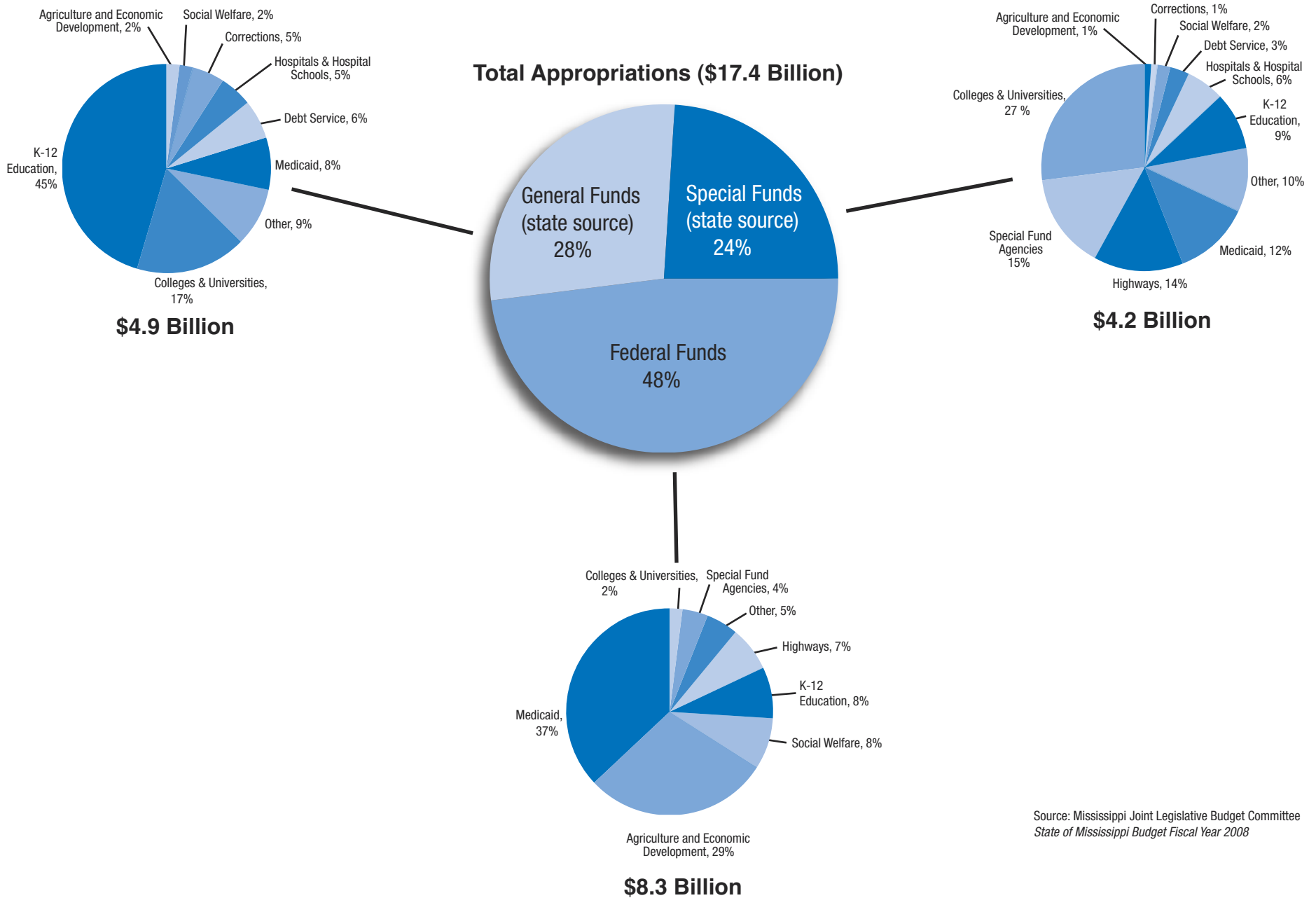
It should be noted that hurricane recovery appropriations had a significant effect on the FY 2008 budget. For example, Agriculture and Economic Development is not usually one of the largest appropriations categories; however, it accounts for 15% of the total appropriations for FY 2008. These appropriations were largely funded with federal dollars through the Mississippi Development Authority — the agency responsible for administering the federal funds for Hurricane Katrina recovery. As a comparison, Agriculture and Economic Development appropriations for FY 2007 only accounted for 2% of total appropriations.

As noted in Chapter 2, the state budget comprises three types of funds: general funds, special funds, and federal funds, with federal-source funds being the largest of the three (see Figure 1). The services and programs shown in Figure 3 are funded with different mixtures of the three types of funds, with some paid for entirely by General Funds and others funded primarily by Special Funds or Federal Funds. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of general fund, federal fund, and other state-source special fund appropriations for FY 2008.

As Figure 4 indicates, Public Education and Higher Education, combined, will receive over half of every general fund dollar and only 10 cents of every federal fund dollar. In contrast, Medicaid will receive eight cents of every general fund dollar and 37 cents of every federal fund dollar.



**Figure 4:**  
**Appropriations by Fund Type FY 2008**



Source: Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee  
State of Mississippi Budget Fiscal Year 2008



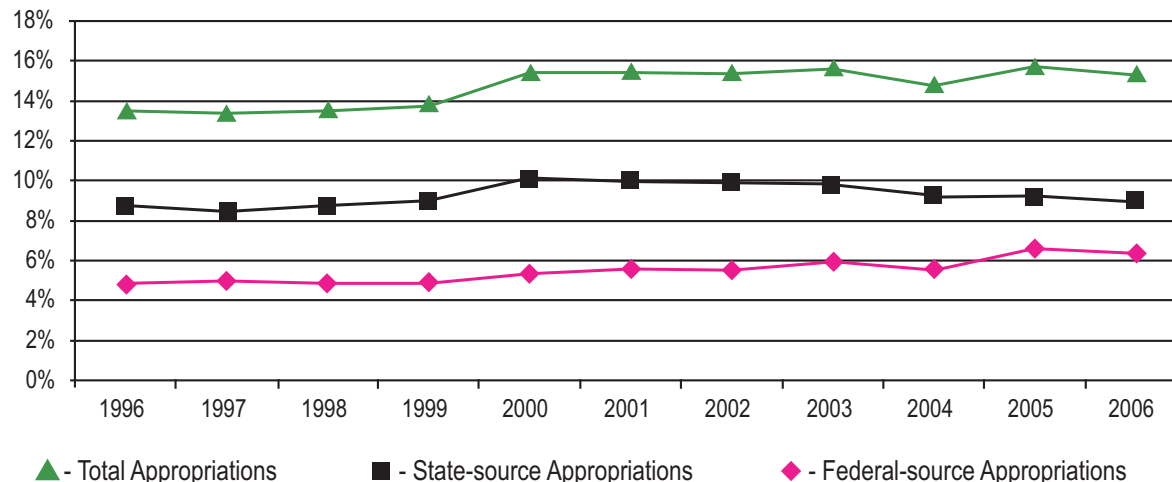
## How has State Spending Changed over Time?

There are many different ways to look at changes in state spending. Going back to our analogy of family spending patterns, a family may incur more expenses as children are born, and as elderly parents age. Likewise, as the prices of gas, groceries and health care increase, a family must find ways to pay for increases in the costs of goods and services. Similarly, the state's spending requirements change as it adds population, and as the prices it pays for things change.

One way to take these changes into account is to adjust spending for inflation; that is, to take into consideration the fact that prices increase every year on most everything the state buys — both goods (like schoolbooks) and services (like health care). Because of inflation, a dollar buys less today than it did in 2000. Adjusting for inflation controls for these changes, so the amount of goods and services purchased this year can be compared with the amount purchased in other years.

Adjusting for inflation is important, but it leaves out other important contexts for state spending, such as population changes and the amount of money people in the state are earning. Another method captures these factors, and that is to look at state spending as a percentage of the **State Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**. The State GDP is a measure of the state's total economy, and therefore is an important indicator of how much the state can afford to spend on public priorities. Figure 5 shows the trends in total, federal-source, and state-source appropriations as a percentage of State GDP.

**Figure 5:**  
Total Appropriations, Federal and State Appropriations as a Share of the State's Economy (FY 1996-FY 2006)



Source: Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee *State of Mississippi Budget (1996-2006) Schedule IV* and Marianne Hill, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning University Research Center, *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*, June 2007 gross state product data

Figure 5 shows that between 1996 and 2006, state-source spending as a share of the state's economy held relatively steady, peaking in 2000 and declining slightly through 2006. In 2000, state-source spending represented 10.1% of the State Gross Domestic Product. By 2006, these appropriations had fallen to 9% of the state GDP.

### Key Terms

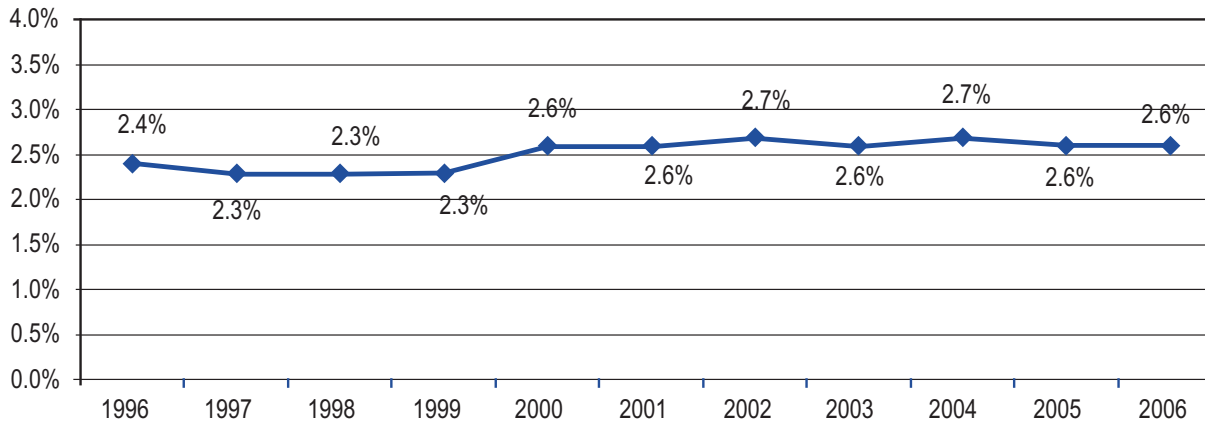
#### State Gross Domestic Product (GDP) –

State Gross Domestic Product is a measure of the total income produced in the state in a given year, including salaries, dividends, and interest. As a measure of the state's income, State GDP is useful for determining how much the state can afford to spend on public priorities.

While state-source spending held relatively steady as a share of the Mississippi economy over the last several years, the state benefited from increases in federal funds. Federal appropriations as a share of the state's economy rose from 4.9% in 1996 to 6.4% in 2006. This growth was primarily the result of increased federal spending on health care, transportation and social services. Because of the increase in federal funds, total state spending increased as a share of the state's economy — from 13.5% in 1996 to 15.4% in 2006 — even as spending from state sources held relatively steady.



**Figure 6:**  
Public Education State-source Appropriations as a Share of the State's Economy (FY 1996-FY 2006)



Source: Mississippi Joint Legislative Budget Committee *State of Mississippi Budget (1996-2006) Schedule IV* and Marianne Hill, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning University Research Center, *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*, June 2007 gross state product data

### Putting the Pieces Together on state spending

- \* For FY 2008, the Mississippi State Legislature appropriated over \$17 billion. The appropriations included state and federal funds.
- \* The biggest overall expenditure was Medicaid, which was primarily funded with earmarked federal dollars. The largest general fund appropriations were made for education, both K-12 and colleges and universities.
- \* General Fund spending, as a percentage of State GDP, has been relatively stable, suggesting that increases or decreases in spending are in line with the growth of the state's economy.

### What about Large Budget Items?

As discussed above, a meaningful way to look at changes in spending over time is as a percentage of State GDP. An analysis of large budget items, including public education, higher education, and corrections, shows that spending in these areas has remained relatively steady over the past decade. As the largest general fund item, public education expenditures serve as a good example of this trend. Public education spending has stayed fairly constant as a share of the state's economy (Figure 6).



## CHAPTER 4 –

# A Detailed Look at State Revenue



## From Where Does the State Get its Money?

After hearing about how the state spends its money, a natural question is, “How does the state pay for all of its programs and services?” In order to make government work, the state collects **revenue** from residents and businesses in the form of taxes and fees. The state also receives money from the federal government to assist in providing certain government services (Figure 7).

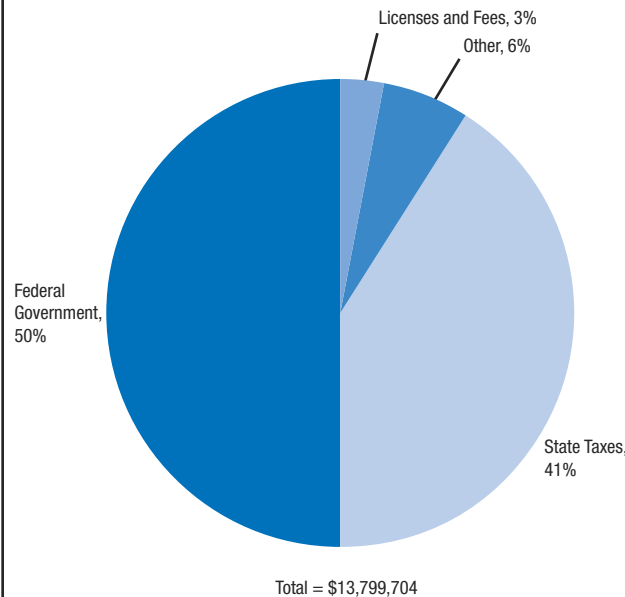
### Key Terms

**Revenue** – The state’s income from any source, including tax collections, fees, and intergovernmental grants.



Mississippi  
Economic Policy  
Center

**Figure 7:**  
**State of Mississippi Governmental Fund**  
**Revenues by Source, FY 2006**



Source: *Mississippi Comprehensive Annual Financial Report FY 2006*, p. 158

In FY 2006, the state collected \$13.8 billion<sup>14</sup> in revenue from residents, businesses and the federal government.<sup>15</sup> Of each dollar collected by the state of Mississippi, 41 cents came from state taxes, 50 cents came from the federal government and nine cents came from licenses, fees, interest, court settlements, and other sources.

## State Taxes

The state collects taxes from individuals and businesses within the state. State taxes include:

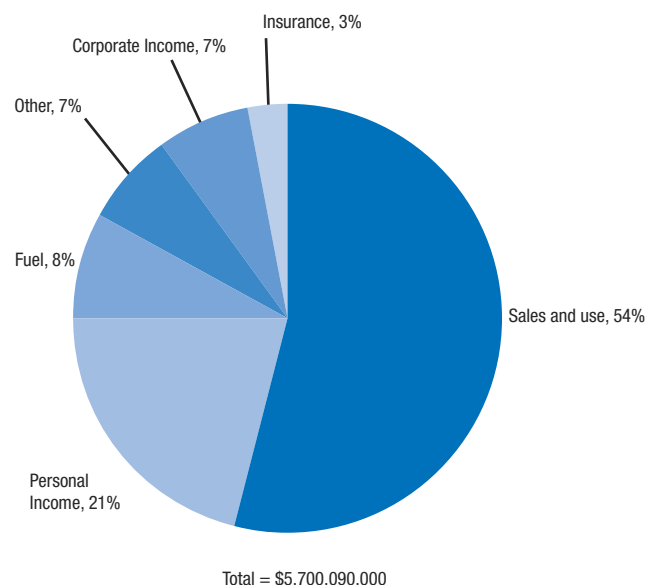
- Income taxes, which are a percentage of individual and business income;
- Sales and use taxes, which are a percentage of the price of goods and services purchased in the state; and
- Special taxes on certain businesses, like casinos, and certain goods, like gasoline.

In FY 2006, Mississippi collected \$5,700,090,000 in state taxes. Figure 8 shows Mississippi’s tax revenue collections by source in FY 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Please note that the total revenue figure for FY 2006 (\$13.8B) is different from the \$17.4B total appropriations in FY 2008 because they refer to different years. Appropriations data is available sooner than revenue data for a fiscal year because appropriations are made in advance of the fiscal year, while revenue data is not compiled until after the close of a fiscal year. While the raw number of appropriations usually goes up every year, the large increase between FY 2006 and FY 2008 is largely due to the availability of federal funds for hurricane recovery and rebuilding.

<sup>15</sup> This amount only includes the State’s governmental funds, such as the general fund, the health care fund accounts, the capital projects fund accounts, special revenue funds, debt service funds, and some other permanent funds. It does not include component units such as Universities. Some of the other data provided on tax revenue for individual taxes is from the State Tax Commission’s Annual Report and shows all tax collection.

**Figure 8:  
State Tax Revenue by Source FY 2006**



Source: *Mississippi Comprehensive Annual Financial Report* FY 2006, p. 158

As shown in the chart, sales and use taxes made up the largest portion of state tax revenue in FY 2006 at 54%. The second largest revenue stream was the personal income tax, which made up 21% of state revenues. The corporate income tax made up only 7% of state tax revenue.

### *Sales Tax*

Mississippi generated most of its state tax revenue, \$3,074,831,000 (54%) from the sales and use taxes.<sup>16</sup> According to an analysis of U.S. Census data, Mississippi ranked 7th in the country in the amount of general sales taxes paid per resident in FY 2006 (\$1,047).<sup>17</sup>

Traditionally, sales taxes are charged on the purchase of goods. Mississippi taxes most goods at a rate of 7%. Mississippi's sales tax on goods includes all retail purchases of tangible personal property including, but not limited to groceries, clothes, toiletries, and over-the-counter medications. The state also charges a 5% sales tax on automobiles.<sup>18</sup>

Mississippi also taxes some services at the rate of 7%. For example, the installation of air conditioning systems and electrical work are taxable services. However, some services are not taxed. Some services that are not taxed include many professional services, such as legal services, accounting services and other services like dry cleaning and massage therapy.

Of the \$2.8 billion in sales taxes collected in FY 2006, about half of the collections came from taxing food, vehicles, and general merchandise (including clothes).<sup>19</sup> The tax on food is notable because Mississippi charges one of the highest sales tax rates on groceries in the nation. Only Mississippi and Alabama still extend their full sales tax rate to groceries. Other states with a sales tax on groceries provide a rebate or credit that offsets some of the sales taxes paid on groceries by some residents.<sup>20</sup> Mississippi — as required of all states by federal law — does exempt food purchases made with food stamps and through the Women, Infant, and Children's (WIC) Program from sales tax.

### *Personal Income Taxes*

In FY 2006, the personal income tax was the state's second largest source of tax revenue. Mississippi collected 21% of its tax revenues, or \$1,213,733,000, from individual income taxes.<sup>21</sup> Of the 43 states that have an income tax, Mississippi ranked 41st in the amount of income taxes paid per person (\$431), according to an analysis of FY 2006 Census data.<sup>22</sup> Mississippi's income tax is relatively flat, meaning that most taxpayers pay a similar effective tax rate. There are three tax brackets — 3%, 4%, and 5% — and everyone with more than \$10,000 in taxable income pays at the top (5%) rate.<sup>23</sup> Taxable income is total income minus a number of exemptions and deductions, which add up to about \$20,000 for a typical family of four, but can be more if the taxpayer itemizes deductions.<sup>24</sup>

### *Corporate Income Taxes*

The corporate income tax is a tax on business profits. Only about 7% of the state's revenue in FY 2006 came from taxing businesses through the corporate income tax. Corporate income taxes work in much the same way as the personal income tax, with brackets of 3%, 4%, and 5%.<sup>25</sup>

A corporation's income tax liability may be reduced by one of the state's many corporate tax credits. Tax credits lower the tax owed by the corporation by the amount of the tax credit. In Mississippi, tax credits are provided to corporations for a wide variety of actions, including creating new jobs, providing child/dependent care for employees, and producing motion pictures in the state.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Use tax is similar to sales tax, but applies to purchases on which sales taxes were either not paid or were paid at a lower rate than Mississippi sales tax law requires. Often, this law applies when the purchase of an item, such as an automobile, is made in another state. Use tax rates are the same as those applicable under the sales tax law, but the taxpayer receives credit for any sales tax already paid on the item. The State collected \$280,459,459 in use taxes in 2006.

<sup>17</sup> MEPC Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>18</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-65-17

<sup>19</sup> *Mississippi State Tax Commission Annual Report* FY 2006, pp. 82-84

<sup>20</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities *Which States Tax The Sale of Food for Home Consumption in 2007?*, February 23, 2007

<sup>21</sup> *Mississippi Comprehensive Annual Financial Report* FY 2006, p. 158

<sup>22</sup> MEPC Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>23</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-7-5

<sup>24</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-7-21, §27-7-17

<sup>25</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-7-5

<sup>26</sup> Mississippi State Tax Commission Tax Incentives for Economic Development, 2004



Mississippi also charges a franchise tax on businesses operating in the state at a rate of \$2.50 per \$1,000 of the value of resources invested in the State.<sup>27</sup> The minimum franchise tax to be paid by Mississippi corporations each year is \$25. Corporations pay the franchise tax on top of their corporate income tax liability.

In FY 2006, Mississippi collected \$354,751,599 in corporate income and franchise taxes after granting \$70,020,715 in tax credits to corporations.<sup>28</sup> The collections in FY 2006 amounted to \$109 per capita, for a ranking of 39th out of the 47 states with corporate income tax collections.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Other State Taxes*

The remaining 18% of the state's tax revenue came from a number of other taxes including cigarette taxes, taxes on gaming establishments, and taxes on fuel and insurance.<sup>30</sup>

## Local Taxes

Like the state, counties and municipalities levy taxes to pay for the services they provide. These taxes include property taxes, special sales taxes, and other taxes such as local utility taxes. The largest of these is the property tax, which is paid by individuals, businesses, and public utilities on the property they own, including real estate, automobiles, and other personal property.

Property taxes are the largest source of tax revenue for Mississippi's counties and municipalities. On average, 93.4% of local tax revenue is collected from property taxes.<sup>31</sup> This revenue is used to fund most of the public services that residents rely on, including public education, police and fire services, and garbage collection. About 40% of the taxes collected on a county level are used to fund county schools; an additional one-third of the tax revenue is used to fund the county general fund, which pays for county administration; and the remaining revenue pays for services such as fire protection and garbage collection.<sup>32</sup>

In Mississippi, both **real property** and **personal property** are taxed. Real property encompasses all real estate, and personal property includes automobiles, mobile homes, furniture, machinery and equipment, and inventories.

#### **Key Terms**

**Real Property** – property, such as land and buildings, that cannot be moved

**Personal Property** – property, such as automobiles and mobile homes, that can be moved

**Ad Valorem Taxes** – tax based on the value of real or personal property

## Other Revenue Sources

#### *Federal Funds*

As shown in Figure 7, 50%, or \$6.8 billion, of state revenues came from the federal government in FY 2006. The federal government provides money to states to help pay for specific programs. Often, the state is required to pay a portion of the program costs by matching federal dollars. For example, in FY 2006, the state's federal Medicaid match rate was 76%, meaning that for each dollar of Medicaid spending, 24 cents were paid by the state, and 76 cents were paid by the federal government.<sup>33</sup>

Over the last several years, Mississippi has experienced an increase in the share of total state revenues it receives from the federal government (Figure 9). Federal Medicaid payments to cover the rising cost of health care account for a large portion of the increase.



<sup>27</sup> MISSISSIPPI CODE ANN. §27-13-5

<sup>28</sup> *Mississippi State Tax Commission Annual Report FY 2006*, pp. 51-56

<sup>29</sup> MEPC Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau

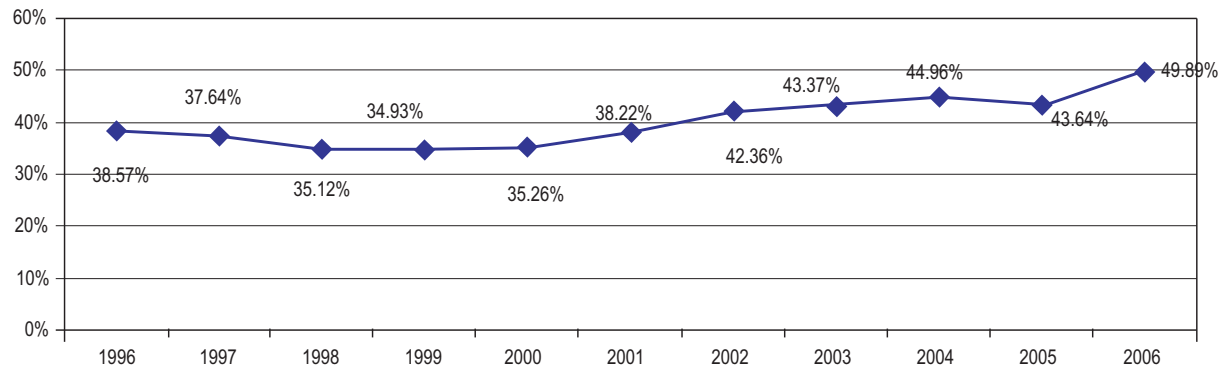
<sup>30</sup> *Mississippi State Tax Commission Annual Report FY 2006*

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *State and Local Government Finances: 2004-05*, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>32</sup> Mississippi State Tax Commission *2005-2006 County Millage Rates*

<sup>33</sup> Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center for Children and Families *FMAP rates 2006*

**Figure 9:**  
**Federal Revenues as a Share of Total Governmental Fund Revenues FY 1996 – FY 2006**



Source: *Mississippi Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, FY 2003, 2005, 2006.

#### *Fees*

Fees are funds collected from users of a particular government service. For instance, the Department of Motor Vehicles charges a fee for a driver's license. The state's public universities charge tuition. Fees are generally set up so that those who don't use a service do not have to pay for that service. In practice, however, many programs are paid for partially by fees and are subsidized with taxes as well.

In FY 2006, the state received \$448,482,000 in licenses, fees, and permits, and \$279,899,000 in charges for sales and services of governmental funds. Charges for sales and services include revenues such as funds collected through the wholesale sales of alcoholic beverages and the sale of state assets like real estate.<sup>34</sup>

#### **Putting the Pieces Together on State Revenue**

- In FY 2006, Mississippi collected \$13.8 billion in revenue. Most of the revenue came from state taxes and federal funds.
- The two primary sources of state tax revenue are the sales tax and the income tax. Mississippi ranks very high relative to other states in the amount of money collected per person through the sales tax. Conversely, Mississippi ranks very low in the amount of money collected per person through the income tax.
- Mississippi receives a large share of its annual revenue from federal funds. Over the years, the amount of federal funds as a share of total state revenue has increased.



<sup>34</sup> Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration Staff.

## CHAPTER 5 –

# Evaluating Mississippi's Tax System



## How Does One Evaluate a Tax System?

There are a number of factors used to evaluate a tax system. While opinions on what qualifies as a good tax system differ, there is general agreement that some of the most important factors include adequacy, fairness, stability, and transparency.<sup>35</sup>

### *Adequacy*

A tax system is considered adequate if it collects enough revenue to pay for the services required by residents and policy makers.

One threat to the adequacy of a tax system is a **structural deficit**. In states with a structural deficit, revenues do not grow at the same rate as the costs of providing government services. As noted earlier, providing services becomes more expensive each year as the costs of goods and labor increase. If revenues do not keep up with these increased costs, the state must either raise taxes or cut services. In a state without a structural deficit, the tax system will collect sufficient revenue each year to cover the increased costs without raising tax rates.

### *Fairness*

There are two main areas of thought on tax fairness, and both can be incorporated in a good tax system. The first area of thought, which is most commonly considered when evaluating tax fairness, is the “ability to pay principle.” This principle suggests that persons with higher incomes, or greater ability to pay, should pay more in taxes than those with lower incomes. Based on their adherence to this principle, taxes can be categorized into three types:

- **Progressive:** A tax system is progressive if persons with higher incomes pay a greater percentage of their income in taxes than those with lower incomes. Most income taxes, including the federal income tax, are designed to be progressive.
- **Proportional:** A tax system is proportional if all persons, regardless of income level, pay the same percentage of their income in taxes.
- **Regressive:** A tax system is regressive if persons with lower incomes pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than those with higher incomes. Sales taxes are generally regressive because families with lower incomes tend to spend a larger fraction of their income on taxed goods than do higher-income families.

### **Key Terms**

**Structural Deficit** – A situation in which a government’s tax structure is not designed to collect enough revenue to pay for services as costs increase.

The second area of thought, the “benefit principle,” maintains that persons who benefit more from a service should pay more for that service than those who benefit less. This principle is often the justification for establishing special taxes or charging fees for government services. For instance, highway maintenance is paid for in part by a petroleum tax. As a result, persons who drive on the roads are paying more for highway maintenance than others. However, many programs are only partially paid for by fees, because they provide value to the public beyond those who benefit directly. For example, the Wildlife, Fisheries and Park Department receives fees from hunting and fishing licenses and from visitors to state parks, but it also receives general funds because even those who do not visit state parks, or hunt and fish, benefit from the Department’s work.

### *Stability*

A stable tax system provides a steady revenue stream as the economy rises and falls. A tax system that is sensitive to economic downturns results in less tax revenue when government services are often needed most. Likewise, an unstable tax system may result in a surplus during times of economic prosperity.

### *Transparency*

The transparency of a tax system indicates whether or not information about the tax system is easy to obtain. Available information should include who and what is taxed, the process for making tax decisions, and how the funds collected are spent. Some states with high transparency use tools like fiscal notes and tax incidence analysis. Fiscal notes provide an estimate of the revenues gained or lost for a proposed change in law. Tax incidence analysis provides an estimate of how different income groups are affected by a tax or proposed tax change.

<sup>35</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy *Guide to Fair State and Local Taxes*, February 2005; Tax Foundation *Ten Principles of Sound Tax Policy*; and the National Conference on State Legislatures *Principles of a High-Quality State Revenue System*, Fourth edition, June 2001

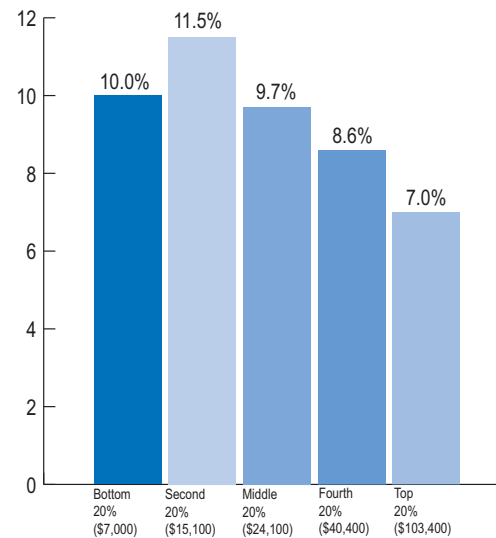
## Evaluating Mississippi's Taxes

Mississippi's bundle of taxes has some progressive elements and some regressive elements. As a whole, Mississippi's state tax policies are regressive: the top 20% of income earners pay the lowest percentage of their income towards state and local taxes, while the bottom 40% pay the highest percentage of their income towards state and local taxes (Figure 10).

An analysis of Mississippi's sales and income taxes illustrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of Mississippi's tax system.

**Figure 10:**  
**Total taxes paid as a percentage of income by income group - 2002**

(Average income is in parentheses)



Source: MEPC Analysis of data from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy.  
Note: Total taxes paid takes into account the amount of state and local taxes paid that can be deducted on a filer's federal income tax form, if the taxpayer itemizes

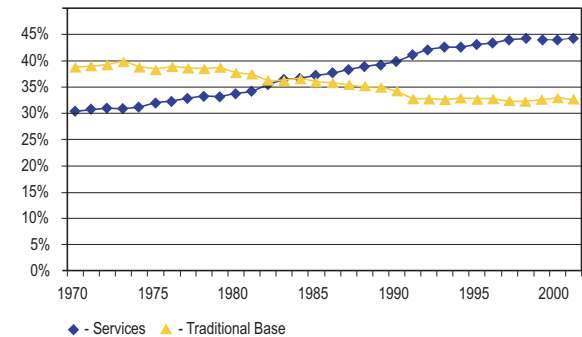
### Mississippi Sales Tax

As seen in Figure 8, Mississippi sales and use tax represents over half of state tax revenues. States with a strong emphasis on a sales tax tend to have more regressive tax systems, because people with low incomes pay a higher proportion of their income on taxed items — for example, groceries and clothing — than people with high incomes. Sales taxes can be made more or less regressive depending on what goods or services are taxed. Mississippi's sales tax is more regressive than other states' because Mississippi taxes food at the full 7%. With Arkansas' reduction of sales tax on groceries in July of 2007, Mississippi is now one of only two states to fully tax food without any offsets.<sup>36</sup>

According to an analysis of U.S. Census data, Mississippi ranks 7th in the country in the amount of general sales taxes (\$1,047) paid per resident of the state.<sup>37</sup>

From an adequacy and stability standpoint, taxing services could expand the tax base and allow tax revenues to keep up with the growth of the economy. From 1970 to 2001, the purchase of services increased from 31% to 44% of all household purchases nationally.<sup>38</sup> During the same period, goods traditionally subject to the sales tax fell from 39% to 33% of household purchases (Figure 11). As a result of this shift in buying patterns, revenue from sales taxes on goods is not keeping up with the growth in sales overall.

**Figure 11:**  
**Household Consumption of Items Composing Traditional State Sales Tax Base vs. Household Consumption of Services 1970-2001**



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

<sup>36</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities *Which States Tax The Sale Of Food For Home Consumption In 2007?*, February 23, 2007

<sup>37</sup> MEPC Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>38</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities *Expanding Sales Taxation of Services: Options and Issues*, June 19, 2003

### Mississippi Personal Income Tax

Mississippi's individual income tax is progressive, but only slightly so. The top tax rate of 5% starts at \$10,000 of taxable income, or \$29,600 of gross income for a family of four. Thus a family of four earning \$30,000 pays the same marginal tax rate as a family of four earning \$250,000. In essence, Mississippi's income tax operates more like a proportional, or flat, tax than a progressive tax.

Additionally, since 2005, Mississippi has taxed the income of families below the poverty line (Figure 12). The poverty line is adjusted for inflation. Each year, the poverty level for a family of four increases. Whereas the poverty line for a family of four was \$19,307 in 2004, the poverty line rose – along with the costs of many other things, like food and gas – to \$20,615 in 2006. During the same period, Mississippi's tax threshold – the amount of income on which Mississippians start

paying income taxes – remained the same at \$19,600. Without adjustment, the number of families in poverty subject to income taxes will increase each year, as the federal poverty level increases, but the tax threshold remains the same.

### Mississippi's Corporate Income Tax

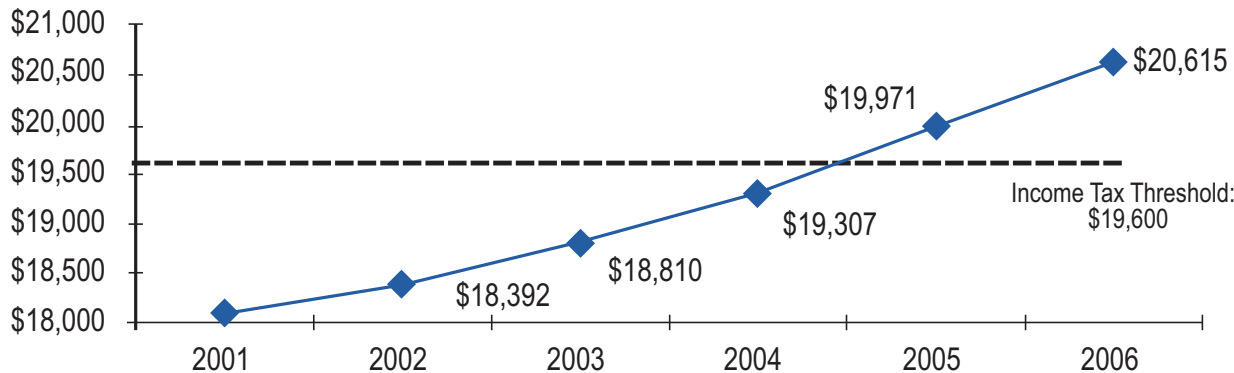
Mississippi currently offers a range of corporate tax incentives to stimulate economic development. In recent years, the state has taken some positive steps towards measuring the effectiveness of these incentives. For example, the state provides a quarterly report on the Advantage Jobs Initiative (AJI) which outlines the total jobs assisted or created by economic development projects receiving the AJI subsidies. On the other hand, there are some programs where there are no good channels to gather information on the programs' effectiveness. For example, the Jobs Tax Credit provides a credit of up to 10% of a company's

payroll against corporate income taxes.<sup>39</sup> The Annual Tax Expenditure Report estimates that employers will claim credits of about \$22,000,000 against their corporate income tax in 2007.<sup>40</sup> However, there is no way to answer questions about the number of jobs that are created through the credit, because of the way it is reported through the tax filing system. A system of making the incentive impact information publicly available and easily accessible would increase accountability to ensure the overall effectiveness of the incentive program.

### Putting the Pieces Together – Evaluating Mississippi's Tax System

- While Mississippi's tax system has some progressive elements and some regressive elements, it is regressive overall because of its heavy reliance on the sales tax.
- The Mississippi sales tax is regressive. People with low incomes pay a higher proportion of their income towards the tax than people with high incomes. Mississippi's sales tax is especially regressive because it fully taxes groceries – an expenditure that low-income working families cannot avoid making.
- The income tax is structured to be progressive, but a large proportion of taxpayers pay the tax at the top rate. Additionally, in 2006, some families in poverty will pay income taxes due to tax thresholds that have not been updated in several years.
- Taken together, the bundle of state tax policies is not as fair as it might be: the top 20% of income earners pay the lowest percentage of their income towards state taxes, while the bottom 40% pay the highest percentage of their income towards state taxes.

**Figure 12:**  
**State Income Tax Threshold and Federal Poverty Line for a Family of Four (2001-2006)**



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities *The Impact of State Income Taxes on Low-Income Families in 2006*, March 27, 2007



<sup>39</sup> Information about Mississippi Development Authority Tax Credits/Exemptions is available at <http://www.mississippi.org/content.aspx?url=/page/3350&>

<sup>40</sup> Institute of Higher Learning Center for Policy Research and Planning *2006 Tax Expenditure Report*



## CHAPTER 6 –

# Putting the Pieces Together: How Mississippians Can Get Involved



Although the Legislature and the Governor make spending decisions, taxpaying residents also have an important role in the budget process. Residents have the responsibility to ensure that the state budget meets the collective needs and reflects the collective values of all the state's people. There are many ways to track and influence the budget-making process. Below are several examples of ways to get involved.

### Step #1 – Keep Current

The most basic way that one can be involved is to know what is going on. Reading the newspaper and watching the news are excellent first steps. In addition to the stories that run on the front page and local sections, the Sunday paper often includes editorials that comment on tax and budget issues – especially on hot topics.

### Step #2 – Enhance your Knowledge

If a newspaper article or TV news story piques your interest, there are several good sources for additional information. The Center for Policy Research and Planning at the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning publishes the *Annual Tax Expenditure Report*, which includes information on how much the state spends on corporate tax credits. The Center also produces a publication called the *Mississippi Economic Outlook and Review*. Likewise, the Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) conducts budget and tax analyses and posts them online at [www.mepconline.org](http://www.mepconline.org). You can sign up for e-mail updates on the MEPC website as well.

### Step #3 – Engage Others

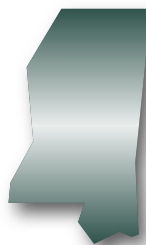
The easiest way to get involved is to contact a nonprofit organization that is already working on an issue of interest. Many nonprofit organizations have an understanding of the budget process and can tell you how to get involved – from writing a letter to a legislator to meeting face-to-face with government officials.

Nonprofit advocacy organizations can also help keep you updated on key people and events influencing the legislative process. For example, nonprofit organizations often know which legislators are important to contact on issues you care about. The organizations can also alert you about special hearings or provide summaries of the hearings if you are unable to attend.

### Looking Ahead

If you've made it this far, we hope that Mississippi's Budget and Tax systems have become a little less puzzling to you. Budget decisions directly influence the quality of education that our children receive, the condition of the roads that we travel, the safety of our communities and the level of trust we can place in professionals such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses. Of course, each of these services – education, road maintenance and public health and safety – has a price tag and must be paid for through taxes or fees. Strong fiscal systems are needed to ensure that the funds are available – in a good economy or in a slow economy – to cover the costs of the services that Mississippi residents depend on every day. It is important to know how the system works to ensure that it works efficiently and effectively.





Mississippi  
Economic Policy  
Center

Mississippi Economic Policy Center  
4 Old River Place, Suite A  
Jackson, MS 39202  
(601) 944-1100

[www.mepconline.org](http://www.mepconline.org)

