



When you look in their eyes, you see the hope of a thousand dreams and the wish for a future filled with endless possibilities. When they look in your eyes, they are looking for a helping hand, a guiding force and the wind to help them sail smoothly in to the future.

We know a successful tomorrow depends on a good education today. Unfortunately, too many Mississippi children are not receiving the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and the workplace. They live in districts where the adults in the community—parents, educators and leaders—do not expect enough of their schools. In fact, they do not demand excellence of their schools and instead accept mediocrity and low performance.

As a state, we cannot set idly by while underperforming schools take opportunities away from children. Many of these children come from generations of poverty. We all know that the only way to break the cycle of poverty is through education. The only way to bring our state off the bottom of so many lists is through economic development, which depends on education to provide a qualified and competent workforce.

When we accept low performance from even just a few districts, we are denying thousands of children hope for a better future. We are also crippling our state from having any chance of moving ahead. The Task Force on Underperforming Schools and Districts, as established by Senate Bill 2405 in the 2008 Legislative Session, has developed the following recommendations to help underperforming schools become successful, giving the children in these districts and all Mississippians hope for a better future.

Today, we begin a new day in Mississippi--a day in which we truly put children first.

Recommendations

Accountability

- The success of schools—on everything from student achievement to finances to leadership—should be transparent and reported to the public through the local newspaper and district website.
- The state should have a process and the necessary funding for early intervention as school performance begins to decline.

Leadership

- Superintendents and school board members form a leadership team and, as such, should face the same consequences, from additional training to removal from office, when a school district is not successful.
- Principals should also be held accountable for the success or failure of their schools; further study is needed to develop appropriate incentives and consequences for principals.
- Superintendents should prove the acquisition of knowledge and skills specific to that position by obtaining a superintendent's license.

Teaching

- The Legislature should consider the final recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Preparation established in 2006.
- The Legislature should provide funds for a national and international recruitment program and a study of the Critical Needs Scholarship Program.

Funding

- Each school district should be audited by the state auditor once every four years and not more than three consecutive years by the same firm.
- The Legislature should establish a revolving building fund that schools can borrow against to complete renovation and repair projects.
- The cost savings available through consolidation should be studied, while balancing the impact on student performance.

Community Involvement

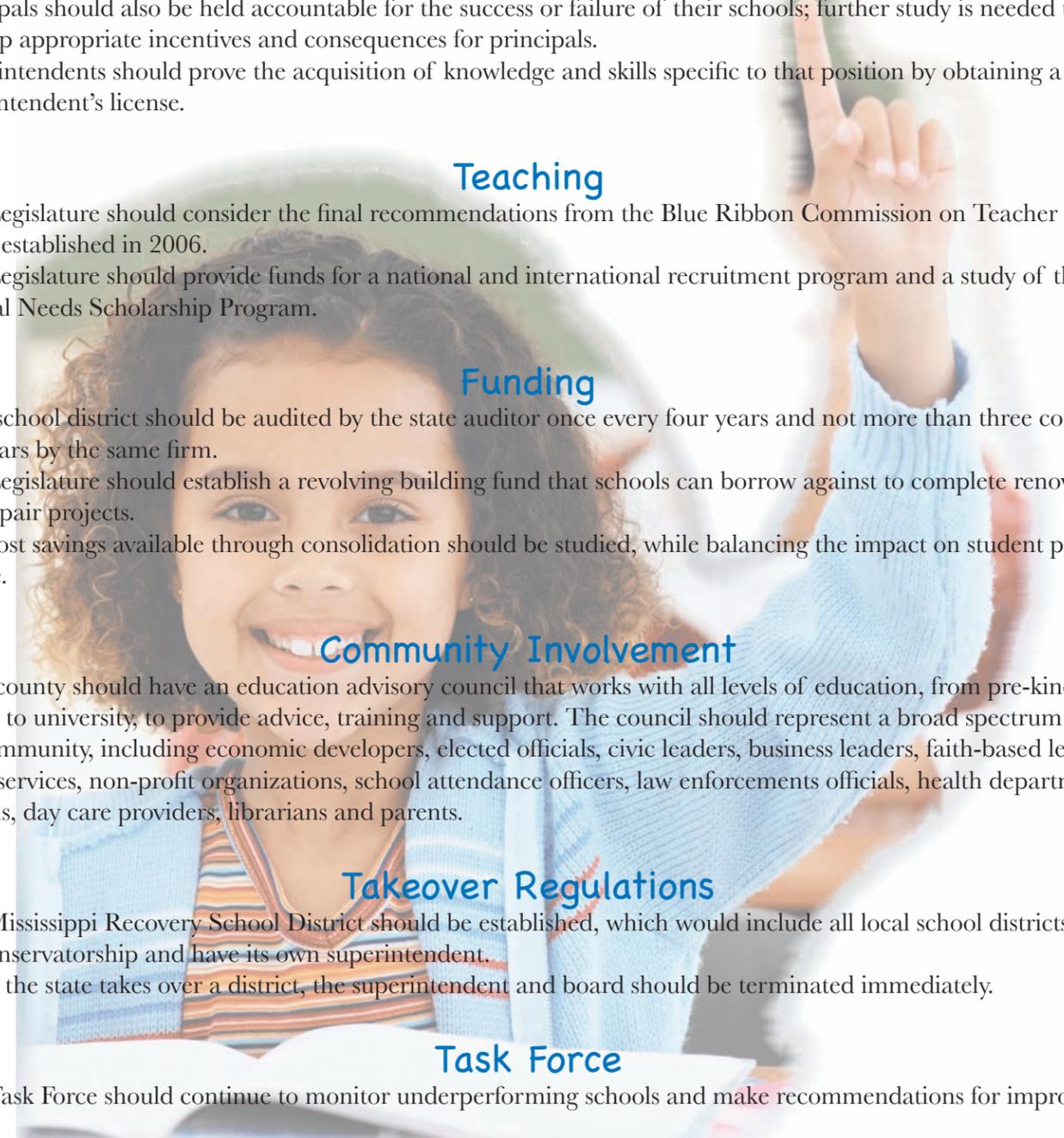
- Each county should have an education advisory council that works with all levels of education, from pre-kindergarten to university, to provide advice, training and support. The council should represent a broad spectrum of the community, including economic developers, elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, faith-based leaders, social services, non-profit organizations, school attendance officers, law enforcements officials, health department officials, day care providers, librarians and parents.

Takeover Regulations

- The Mississippi Recovery School District should be established, which would include all local school districts under conservatorship and have its own superintendent.
- When the state takes over a district, the superintendent and board should be terminated immediately.

Task Force

- The Task Force should continue to monitor underperforming schools and make recommendations for improvements.



Task Force to Study and Report on the Status of Underperforming Schools and School Districts

Senate Bill 2405 of 2008 Regular Session

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