

STR GGLES

Southern Echo, Inc. Summer '09 Edition

A Newsletter
about
Empowerment
and
Accountability



Southern Echo partners with the MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable, in addition to members of the Southwest Organizing Project and Southwest Workers Union from New Mexico hosting a Census and Redistricting meeting to discuss, plan, and evaluate effective strategies enabling community people to impact fair district lines in local governments.

Communities Obtain Redistricting Training To Ensure Creation of Fair Political Boundary Lines in 2011

Jackson, MS – Low-wealth, under-educated and younger communities of color are systematically *under-counted* in the federal census. *Under-counted* communities receive reduced amounts of federal grant dollars, can lose representation in Congress, and are often under-represented in political redistricting plans at all levels of government.

Grassroots community organizations in Mississippi and 10 other states have expressed interest in Southern Echo's training and technical assistance program to prevent under-counts in *hard-to-count* communities in 2010.

- At the national **Pushback Network** Convening in Nevada, June 26-28, 2009, four Echo Census & Redistricting Team members presented two workshops to activist delegates from 13 states on the 2010 census and 2011 redistricting process. Requests to participate in future trainings came from grassroots organizations in **New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Florida, Virginia, New York, Massachusetts, and Nevada.**
- Community leaders from **North Carolina** and **Georgia** have asked Southern Echo to provide assistance on census and redistricting in their states.

- Southern Echo is serving on the Steering Committee of the North Carolina-based **Southern Coalition for Social Justice**, which will create a training institute in 2010 regarding key aspects of the 2011 redistricting process.
- **Southern Echo, South West Organizing Project** and **Southwest Workers Union** held a joint 3-day convening May 15-17, 2009 in Jackson, MS on community organizing around census and redistricting from 2009 to 2013 to build accountable governance at the state, county and municipal levels.
- **Southern Echo's Census & Redistricting Team** is meeting with organizational leadership and public officials across Mississippi as a foundation for building a **Mississippi 2010 Census Stakeholders Alliance.** A mass meeting of Alliance members in the Fall 2009 will be held to heighten consciousness regarding the urgency of an accurate census count in Mississippi and the distortion of political representation and loss of federal grant funds that result from a census undercount.

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Eleven States Seek Training and Technical Assistance from Echo to Build Capacity to Impact Next Census and Redistricting **Cont'd From PG 1**

The meeting will also stress the importance of the Census Bureau employing as census enumerators grassroots people who are not afraid to go into hard to count areas and are known and trusted locally. Attention will also be given to the strategic importance of community and public officials working together through county and city official and unofficial **Complete Count Committees** to monitor the work of census enumerators to ensure a complete and accurate count.

- Echo's Census & Redistricting Team consists of 8 staff members and 3 consultants. Two of the consultants are **Melvin Young**, Director of **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**, and **Demetrius Petty**, a staff member of **Sunflower County Parents & Students Organization**. Both are younger leaders and organizers

who have extensive field work and redistricting experience. The third consultant is **Brian Lipsett**, of **Move-mentech, Inc.**, Naples, ME, who has been Echo's principal trainer and technical guide since 2001 in the use of GIS and graphics software for political redistricting and to convert complex statistical data into visually accessible maps and charts for popular education materials.

- The eight Echo staff members of the inter-generational Census & Redistricting Team are **Leroy Johnson**, **Brenda Hyde**, **Kahlil Johnson**, **Constance Burwell**, **Renarda White**, **Keith French**, **Hollis Watkins** and **Mike Sayer**.
- The Census & Redistricting Team has posted on the Southern Echo website state specific **2010 Census Tool Kits**

for 18 states which consist of state-specific census flyers about the federal census process, local offices contact information, and job opportunities with the Census Bureau; flyers regarding the Complete Count Committee process; an enlarged version of the short-form questionnaire that will be mailed to every household in 2010; and a state map that shows every hard-to-count census tract, the federal grant dollars sensitive to the census count that each county in the state received in 2007 (the latest available data) and the boundary lines of each congressional district and who the congressional representative is for each district. These materials are also on the Echo website at:

Southern Echo has become both a national and a state **Census Bureau Partner** in order to have more effective access to communication with census officials and to information and data produced by the Census Bureau.



South By South West Retreat Results in Four Programs for Joint Work Among 3 Texas, New Mexico, & Mississippi Groups

Albuquerque, NM – At the end of July 2009 **South West Organizing Project** hosted a 4-day **South by South West Experiment** strategic planning retreat in Albuquerque, NM of more than 40 grassroots community activists from **Southwest Workers Union** in the San Antonio, TX area, Southern Echo and the **Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable** in Mississippi, and SWOP in New Mexico.

The long days in the mile high dry heat were framed on the horizon by mountains and volcanoes. The work was grounded by the delicious locally-prepared food throughout the day and evenings, and with hilarious and engaging ice-breakers each morning and afternoon. Younger and older generations of Latino, African American, Native American and Anglo activists toiled zealously to create 4 program tracks: “census and redistricting”, “youth leadership development”, “training curriculum on history, politics and culture”, and

“creating a model of accountable governance”. Other issues addressed included immigration policies and gender rights.

The younger people created their own space and developed a program of work focused on building meaningful participation at the **U.S. Social Forum in Detroit in 2010**.

In the late Fall 2009 S x SW Experiment will hold a summit of public officials and community activists to begin to develop a model of governance, applicable to all levels of government, around which grassroots communities can organize. Date and place are to be determined.

Southern Echo agreed to hold locally-based two-day census and redistricting training workshops in Texas and New Mexico similar to the one held in Jackson, MS May 2009.

Southern Echo's Census & Redistricting Team Presents Workshops on Census and Redistricting Strategies at National Pushback Network Convening in Las Vegas

Las Vegas, NV – Southern Echo Census and Redistricting team members presented two workshops on census and redistricting to grassroots community activists from 15 states at the national Convening of the **Pushback Network** held in Las Vegas, NV July 26-28, 2009.

During the three days of plenary sessions, workshops organizational leaders from several states indicated to Southern Echo team members that they were interested in Southern Echo bringing the census and redistricting training process to organizations in their respective states.

The national convening was designed to enable activists to share the community organizing strategies, tools and skills they use to build organizational capacity within their respective communities to impact the formation and implementation of policy in both the public and private sectors.

The **Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada** (PLAN) hosted the Convening. The Convening provided the opportunity for activists from across the nation to break bread together over scrumptious breakfasts and lunches, where they built an understanding of their common ground across traditional geographic barriers, and explored the possibility of collaboration in support of their mutual goals.

The State of Mississippi was represented at the Convening by a delegation of 19 community leaders from partner organizations in the **Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable**, including **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County** in the **Mississippi Delta Catalyst Roundtable**, including **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**, **Nollie Citizens for Quality Education** (Holmes County), **Sunflower County Parents & Students Organization**, **Concerned Citi-**

zens for a Better Greenville, **Activists With A Purpose** (Grenada County), **Action Communication and Education Reform** (Montgomery County), and **Citizens for Educational Awareness** (Montgomery County).

The **Pushback Network** is a coalition of state-based alliances working to build the capacity of communities of color and of low-wealth through community organizing. A central goal of the Network is to expand meaningful grassroots civic engagement to hold public officials accountable to the needs and interests of communities of color and of low-wealth. Pushback Network partnership members are located in New York, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, New Mexico, Nevada and California. Other states were represented at the Convening through organizations from Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Oregon.

Southern Echo distributed to participating organizations and to workshop participants *2010 Census and Redistricting Tool Kits* which contained state-specific information on how to involve community people in the census process to prevent an undercount in hard-to-count communities of color and low wealth. The *Tool Kits* also contained state-specific maps that identified the hard-to-count census tracts in each county of each state. These maps also showed how many federal grant dollars, which are based on the census count, each county has received in the past in order to illustrate that local communities can lose large amounts of needed federal funds for local programs when there is an undercount in traditionally hard-to-count communities.

Harvard Education Grad School Team Completes Field Work for Study of Echo's Community Organizing Model on Public Education



Jackson, MS — Harvard University Graduate School of Education Researchers Kenneth Russell and Mara Tieken wrapped up the field research portion of their study of Southern Echo's community organizing model designed to empower grassroots communities to create a quality public education accessible to all children in Mississippi.

The study also includes **Nollie Citizens for Quality Education** in Holmes County, **Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization** in Indianola, **Citizens for a Better Greenville** in Washington County, and **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County**.

Harvard Completes Research for Echo Cont'd From PG 4

The study concerns how parents and students become actively involved in the work to impact the formation and implementation of public education policies, how the participant organizations are structured to carry out their work, and how this community organizing model builds the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities and enables the development of new generations of accountable leadership.

The research project began 18 months ago as part of a larger study by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education of five or six different models of work by grassroots community organizations in different parts of the nation that are seeking to bring fundamental changes to the public education systems in their communities.

The research team has made several trips to Mississippi to observe the participant organizations, and to interview organizational leaders, staff and volunteers, local community leaders and public officials, state legislators, state education officials, local education officials and opponents of the participant organizations.

The study is expected to be published in 2009.

2009 Mississippi Legislature Fully Funds Mississippi Adequate Education Program Notwithstanding Deep Budget Cuts

Jackson, MS -- It was the end of June and Mississippi was long overdue on passage of a state budget. There would be no money to pay state workers and key state agencies would have to shut down. Each time the Democratic leadership in the House and the Republican leadership in the Senate reached a budget agreement Republican **Governor Haley Barbour** threatened to veto it and the intimidated Senate negotiators withdrew their consent. But under the Mississippi Constitution the state cannot spend a dime without a budget signed into law. And the clock was about to run out.

Governor Barbour had drawn a line in the sand. He offered to sign a budget only if it slashed public education and Medicaid funding. House negotiators resisted. They said they would only agree to a budget that fully funded the state's public education funding formula and substantially funded Medicaid.

For over six years, Southern Echo's education organizing has been focused on the creation of a quality, first rate and sufficiently funded public education system rooted in accountability. From 2004 to present, Echo and its partners have worked to resist the Governor's attempt to make massive cuts in public education funding.

This year, House negotiators were fortified in their resolve by the support from Southern Echo, the MS Delta Catalyst Roundtable, and more than two dozen other organizations in the **Education Stakeholders Alliance** (a coalition of more than 29 statewide and local grassroots organizations), who brought hundreds of black and white parents and students from across the state to the Capitol to urge legislators to fully fund education. These parents and students made thousands of calls to the offices of the Governor and Lt. Governor. Southern Echo and the Roundtable had worked since 2004 to build this Alliance.

Southern Echo and the Mississippi Catalyst Roundtable were invited by the **Chairmen of the House Education Committee** to provide their input into the recommendations which were submitted to the full House. Full funding of the education formula was achieved for the first time in 2007 and again in 2008, notwithstanding the vigorous opposition of the Governor since he took office in 2004.



The Governor's apparent indifference to consequences was demonstrated earlier in the spring. As businesses closed and unemployment rates in the state soared to ten percent (in some counties as high as twenty percent) the Governor twice vetoed bills to accept the portion of federal stimulus funds that extended unemployment benefits to previously uncovered workers. The Senate would not override the veto.

In this unprecedented bitter partisan atmosphere in the state Capitol it seemed unlikely that any agreement at all could be reached. As the last days of the budget year ticked off the Governor showed his back to the legislators and people of the state when he flew to Paris to discuss economic development issues and to New Hampshire to raise his visibility in anticipation of the 2012 presidential campaign.

With the 12th hour ready to strike the Governor blinked. The Governor agreed to sign a budget bill that provided for full funding of the state education funding formula – the Mississippi Adequate Education Program – and substantial funding of Medicaid.

Southern Echo Provides Three-Week Training in GIS Mapping for Echo's Census and Redistricting Team



Kahlil Johnson (left) works with Dr. Brian Lipsett (right) of Movementech to build his mapping capacity using GIS software during the August 2009 training at Southern Echo's office.

Train-the-trainer program intended to build new generation of demographers-of-color.

Jackson, MS -- At the end of the first week of August 2009 six younger and older members of the Echo census and redistricting team completed an intensive hands-on 3-week training regimen in geographic information systems software.

The goal of this train-the-trainer program is to enable team members to develop the analysis, tools and skills needed to train other younger and older demographers to support community-based redistricting efforts in 2011 and 2012.

At present there are very few community-based demographers-of-color available to support the efforts of grassroots communities in the southern and southwest regions. The number appears to have diminished during the past 20 years. The drawing of and support for fair redistricting plans by grassroots community groups is one of the principal means through which communities can build the basis for the election of representatives who are responsive to their needs and interests.

This 3-week training is the first phase of the team's mapping training. A second phase of intensive hands-on training for team members is in the planning stage.

During the grueling all-day sessions team members learned to use and troubleshoot the highly touted *ESRI ArcGIS 9.3.1 software* to draw state, county and municipal maps that highlight hard-to-count census tracts, and to draw congressional, county and municipal level redistricting maps that meet the deviation requirements of one-person one-vote and the fair districting requirements under the Voting Rights Act. In this learning process team members used available 2000 census and demographic data.

The drawing of new redistricting plans at the congressional, state, county, school board, judicial and municipal levels will begin in 2011 after the release of the 2010 census data.

In July 2009 grassroots community-based organizations from at least 12 states expressed to Southern Echo interest in the possibility of activists from their respective states participating in 2010 in this demographer training program. It is anticipated that in early summer 2010 Echo team members will begin a training program for aspiring activist demographers from organizations in Mississippi and other southern and southwest states.

The Southern Echo team members who participated in the training were Echo Asst. Dir. **Brenda Hyde**, Echo staff member **Constance Burwell**, Echo Intern **Kahlil Johnson**, Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County Exec. Dir. **Melvin Young**, Sunflower County Parents & Students Organization staff member **Demetrius Petty**, and Echo Senior Organizer and Training Coordinator **Mike Sayer**.

Brian Lipsett, Ph.D, a statistician and data analyst who heads Movementech, Inc. in Naples, ME, is a member of the Echo census and redistricting team and was lead instructor in the training. Lipsett, who comes out of the environmental justice movement where he did cutting edge studies of corporate polluters, has provided GIS training to Echo staff since 2001.

Photo Gallery



Members of the SxSW Experiment report back after a session during the July retreat in New Mexico.



Mike Sayer, Southern Echo Staff, provides input during the Southern Coalition for Social Justice census and redistricting strategic planning session in Atlanta, GA.



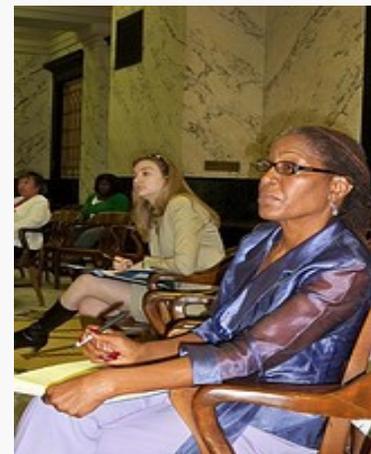
Lexington, Mississippi's Nollie Citizens for Quality Education **Blog Squad** receive website training at Echo's office in Jackson, MS from technology consultant Samiya Bashir.



Aliyah Mason, a ninth grader from Dekalb County Schools in Georgia, creates a poster for the back-2-skool event for Rankin County Schools hosted by Echo's Finance Coordinator and Office Manager, Rachel Mayes.



Four MS Census Bureau Partnership Specialists, in a Gulport, MS workshop, discuss how community can monitor the accuracy of the census count in 2010.

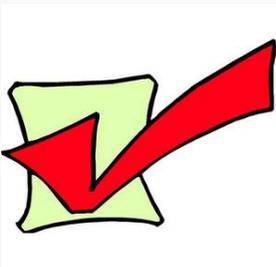


CQE Director, Ellen Reddy, listens intently at Underperforming Schools Taskforce Hearing at the state Capitol.

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SUMMER '09 EDITION



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“For every minute spent in organizing, an hour is earned.”