

# Mississippi Governor's Education Human Capital Task Force

## *Interim Report #1*

Report Commissioned by The Honorable Governor Tate Reeves

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Authored by: The Mississippi Governor's Education Human Capital Task Force Members with  
Support from the Southern Regional Education Board

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In 2020, the Mississippi Department of Education led by State Superintendent Carey Wright, at the direction of Governor Tate Reeves, began convening a group of K-12 education practitioners and advocates, higher education deans and state-level representatives to recommend strategies to help with the ongoing teacher shortage crisis in Mississippi. This group, called the ***Governor's Education Human Capital Task Force*** (referred to as the Task Force), was supported by the Mississippi Department of Education, with the assistance of the Southern Regional Education Board. A membership list is provided in the Appendix. The Task Force began meeting in February 2020 and continues to meet to explore key issues relating to the teacher shortage crisis.

### **The Self-Governing Charge of the Task Force**

*For key agencies and shareholders to collaborate and take action to increase the effectiveness, quantity and diversity of teachers in Mississippi classrooms and improve how we attract, prepare, license, hire, support and retain them.*

In winter 2020, the Task Force thoroughly reviewed Mississippi's policies, initiatives and current program successes and challenges as they relate to the teacher shortage crisis. The Task Force identified three priority areas to address:

- 1) Recruitment and retention of more quality teachers
- 2) Equitable and effective pathways into and through the teaching profession
- 3) Teacher preparation program curriculum and innovation

The following outlines the Task Force's progress and recommendations on the first issue, recruitment and retention, with special attention given to how the current pandemic (COVID-19) may inform needed changes.

## Challenge 1

# Recruitment and Retention of a More Effective and Diverse Teacher Workforce in Mississippi

Mississippi is experiencing a teacher shortage crisis. The number of new teachers has declined over the past ten years, with school districts experiencing 2,100 job vacancies in 2018 and granting only 1,624 initial teacher licenses that same year. [Interest in traditional educator preparation programs declined](#) the last several years and retirement rates are increasing. There are [critical shortages](#) in certain subjects. Mississippi urgently needs to consider how to recruit more and better-prepared individuals into the profession, while also giving special attention to retaining both early-career educators and those who have dedicated their lives to teaching Mississippi's children.

Prior to COVID-19, Mississippi had seen a rise in applicants to alternative educator preparation programs to avoid the time and cost investments necessary for traditional programs. These barriers have been discussed in local Mississippi focus groups, and in response, [Mississippi started the nation's first state-run residency program](#) using a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Now, due to current waivers for licensure requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative educator preparation programs have seen another increase in applicants.

The Task Force feels strongly that current world circumstances provide a unique opportunity to advocate for remote learning and social-emotional strategies in relation to recruiting and retaining more qualified educators. The Task Force has come up with both short- and long-term action items they believe will improve the teaching profession in Mississippi with a mind on acceleration, not remediation, as defined in the [Opportunity Myth](#) report by The New Teacher Project. These strategies are not provided solely because of the current pandemic but are innovative strategies that can help support and encourage teachers throughout their careers.

## Actions Endorsed by the Task Force

### *Strengthen Remote Learning*

#### Short-Term Action Items

- 1) **Traditional educator preparation programs must prepare teacher candidates for remote learning.** Preservice teachers must be ready to teach virtually not only for worst-case scenarios, but to help their students in the best of times.

**State leaders should provide guidance and urge educator preparation programs to begin integrating virtual classroom preparation immediately.** One suggestion is for each education preparation provider (EPP) to partner with at least one school district to provide student teachers the ability to learn to teach remotely. Individual EPPs shall review their existing programs and make the necessary changes to ensure candidates are

prepared for remote teaching, as well as provide a repository of information on virtual teaching and learning for pre-service teachers — these should be considered as examples and resources. [USPREP](#) has a repository of information on virtual learning for pre-service teachers.

- 2) Professional development for virtual learning best practices must be provided to every teacher. As with pre-service teachers, currently licensed educators need to be prepared to teach virtually no matter the situation.

It is the Task Force's recommendation that **the Mississippi Department of Education shall provide guidance and curate resources to support professional development for remote teaching and learning in every school, for every subject and every teacher.** This should be a joint undertaking that includes some or all the following partners: local district leaders, leading remote educators in K-12 and higher education, online platform professionals and additional vendors.

Professional development shall be made available and required prior to the start of the 2020-2021 academic year and updated throughout the school year(s). This can be deployed at large scale through the Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) and at events such as annual conferences sponsored by MDE program offices. SREB has provided [guidance](#) that may be of assistance.

- 3) Teachers are not the only ones being affected by remote learning; students and parents/guardians need guidance regarding virtual instruction as well.

It is the Task Force's recommendation that **technical preparation shall be provided for students, parents and/or guardians on remote learning.** The guidance shall be provided to local education agencies by the Mississippi Department of Education and can be in multiple forms (written, online, or face-to-face meetings). Parents and guardians must receive training on the access and use of online platforms and be prepared to support the teacher's instruction, as well as provide age-appropriate monitoring of their child's work. Students must be instructed on the access and use of the online platform and accept responsibility for its intended use.

By providing learning opportunities for online platform use to students, parents and guardians, teachers will be able to readily engage students in meaningful remote learning experiences without the need of additional instructional time spent teaching the use of the technology. The Gulfport Public School District has already begun working on providing this guidance to their student and parent/guardian population.

### Long-Term Action Items

- 1) In concert with the first item listed above, it is the Task Force's recommendation that **EPPs require remote learning experiences for student teachers and embed remote learning into existing curricula.** The strengthening of clinical practice requirements shall

be monitored through the Mississippi Department of Education's program review process and shall be stated in state Board of Education rule or policy and will be required by all public and private colleges and universities in Mississippi. EPPs shall be required to document faculty participation in ongoing professional learning, especially that which is MDE-sponsored, to ensure a strong continuum of support for pre-service teachers. A collaborative group of MDE, Institutions of Higher Learning, and EPP representatives should develop these programmatic changes.

- 2) Access to students is another barrier that teachers face when instruction is altered from the traditional face-to-face school setting. It is paramount to provide equitable access to *every* student in Mississippi. Governor Reeves recently signed the [Equity in Distance Learning Act](#) which creates a grant fund to allow schools to equip every student with an age-appropriate device. And recently, the federal government [provided CARES Act ReConnect Pilot Program funding](#) to Mississippi, allowing 878 rural households access to high-speed broadband internet. Yet there is still not reliable internet access for the entirety of Mississippi's student population. The Task Force believes that equity must be strongly and continuously advocated for until it is achieved.

It is the Task Force's recommendation that **legislators and state leaders request money to help Rural Electric Cooperatives provide internet access to areas of Mississippi that currently lack reliable access.** The majority of the Rural Electric Cooperatives have pledged \$75 million to this cause and are requesting a matching amount to cover 85% of Mississippi's land mass with internet access. The Task Force **strongly urges legislators and state leaders to collaborate with the three remaining Rural Electric Cooperatives to bring internet access to 100% of Mississippi.**

The Task Force believes that access is vital and funds from the CARES Act or the Governor's Discretionary Fund could be used to help provide Mississippi with greater internet access for students and families.

## *Address Social-Emotional Learning*

### Short-Term Action Items

- 1) Social-emotional learning standards are crucial tools to help educators address the social and emotional needs of students. Standards are currently being developed by the Mississippi Department of Education with hopes of approval by fall 2021.

It is the Task Force's recommendation that **the social-emotional standards be developed and enacted quickly**, with guidance from entities such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and other states (e.g., Virginia – Goochland County).

- 2) It is the Task Force's recommendation that once the social-emotional learning standards are approved, **professional development regarding social-emotional learning shall be**

**provided to all educators.** The Mississippi Department of Education must help create the professional development in partnership with leading organizations in this space. High-quality instructional materials shall be curated by the Mississippi Department of Education, including free open education resources.

### Long-Term Action Items

It is the Task Force's recommendation that **educator preparation programs be required to embed social-emotional learning instruction in their curricula.** Social-emotional learning standards and strategies shall be incorporated within existing educator preparation courses by all public and private colleges and universities in Mississippi. This must be adopted in State Board of Education rule and be monitored through the Mississippi Department of Education's program review process. EPPs shall be required to document faculty participation in ongoing professional learning, especially that which is MDE-sponsored, to ensure a continuum of support for pre-service teachers. A collaborative group of MDE, IHL, and EPP representatives should develop these programmatic changes.

**The Task Force continues to discuss additional strategies to assist in the recruitment and retention of effective teachers. Additional recommendations are forthcoming in a secondary interim report that will also address strategies related to the second challenge: increasing equitable and effective pathways into and through the teaching profession.**

## Appendix

# The Mississippi Governor's Education Human Capital Task Force

### *Membership List*

**The Honorable Tate Reeves**, Governor

**Dr. Richard Blackburn**, Dean of Education, Public Institution of Higher Education,  
Mississippi State University

**Dr. Ben Burnett**, Dean of Education, Private Institution of Higher Education, William Cary  
University

**Dr. Debra Burson**, Bureau Director, Educator Preparation, Mississippi Department of Education

**Kelly Butler**, Chief Executive Officer, Barksdale Reading Institute

**Glen East**, Superintendent of Education, Gulfport School District

**Dr. Karen Elam**, Member, Mississippi State Board of Education

**LaJeremy Hughes**, Elementary Teacher, Della Davidson Elementary, Oxford School District

**Audra Love Kimble**, Mississippi Community College Foundation

**Heather Morrison**, Director, P-20 Partnerships, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

**Dr. Cory Murphy**, Executive Director, Teaching and Leading, Mississippi Department of  
Education

**Dr. Felecia Nave**, President, Alcorn State University

**Dr. David Rock**, Dean, School of Education, University of Mississippi

**Robin Stewart**, Director, Office of Job Connections, Mississippi Department of Employment  
Security

**Sara Stygles**, Lead Teacher, Oak Grove Middle School, Lamar County School District

**Lillie Bryant Sweazy**, Secondary Teacher, Natchez High School, Natchez-Adams School District

**Jackie Turner**, Executive Director, Mississippi Department of Employment Security

**Dr. Carey Wright**, State Superintendent of Education

### *SREB Support Staff* (in alphabetical order):

[Megan Boren](#), [Stevie Lawrence](#), [Stephen Pruitt](#) and [Jessica Snellings](#)