

Please answer the following questions as related to the Governor's initiative of implementing technology for every classroom for the state of Mississippi.

1. Where did the initial meeting take place that determined the need for technology being implemented in the classrooms? Organizational setting, members that saw this need.

Following my inauguration in January 2000, I met with Dr. Richard Thompson to discuss this initiative and other key education issues. Through an Executive Order, I established the Classroom Technology Task Force. This task force included educators, business leaders, foundation executives, and government officials. The Classroom Technology Task Force met in early March in the Sillers Building large conference room to discuss the initiative, fundraising, and implementation.

2. When did this meeting take place? When did the incident begin? How long did it last?

The Governor and Superintendent of Education convened the task force 5 times during 2000 to develop strategies, procurement processes, and deadlines. Mississippi could be the first state in the nation to place an Internet-accessible computer in every public classroom, but we had to move quickly. Other states like Delaware and Kentucky had wired more than 75% of their schools before 2000.

The initiative to put Mississippi first in classroom technology is ongoing.

3. Who initiated the project? Title, function, responsibilities at this time?

Bob Pittman, former CEO of America Online, spoke to the 1999 Mississippi Economic Council's Annual Meeting (May 1999, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Jackson, Mississippi). He challenged his peers in Mississippi to think about the possibilities and opportunities that computer technology would provide for Mississippi students, even in the most rural of areas.

(<http://www.msmec.com/programs/annmeeting.html>)

4. Who else was involved directly or indirectly with the efforts of the project? Who played significant role in the effort of the project?

There are so many people. Every technology coordinator and school superintendent played a tremendous role. Without them the project could have never been a success. Robin Costa, Maddox Foundation; Carolyn Shanks, CEO Entergy Mississippi; Blake Wilson, Mississippi Economic Council and the Public Education Forum; Dave Boliek, CEO, Explornet; the Explornet teachers and students who built 5,952 computers; and so many others. This public/private

partnership is probably one of the largest, most successful partnerships in America. It took all of us working together to make it happen.

5. What were the results of the effort? Be sure to include information that is Qualitative and Quantitative.

We now have 32,354 k-12 classrooms with at least one Internet-accessible computer. Students will have access to resources they could only imagine before. Our schoolchildren will have so many more opportunities to explore and learn, thanks to the success of this initiative. Reading and math scores will improve. Teachers will have access to resources that will improve the learning opportunities for every student in every class.

6. How did completion of the project or effort affect your position and influence in the organization? Did you receive recognition? What kind? How do you feel about the results of the outcome? How do you feel about the response to your role in the outcome of the project?

Mississippi has received national attention for the success of this project. CNN, Channel One, Reader's Digest, the New York Times, and many others have taken notice of our work. Improving our schools has always been my first priority; good schools lead to good jobs that build good communities.

7. Why did you choose to initiate this project? What were your motivations? If someone else suggested the project or effort, why did you follow his or her suggestion? Why did you think it was a worthwhile effort?

Education is key to improving the quality of life for anyone and everyone. Ensuring that students in Woodville or Marks have access to the same resources as students in Jackson, Hattiesburg, Chicago, Los Angeles, London, Moscow, or Tokyo is essential. We have an obligation to provide the best educational system to our children that we can.

8. How did you and or this project challenge the organization's way of doing things? What changes did you initiate? What novel or innovative approaches did you take? Were there risks involved in the approach that you took? What kind?

Never before had Mississippi state government taken on an initiative of this scale. We worked very closely with other state officials, business leaders, community leaders, educators, and many others to create a "buy-in" on this project.

We raised private funds from businesses and foundations. We obtained state and federal funds to complete this project. With the assistance of the Explornet program, we were able to train teachers and students how to build, troubleshoot, and repair computers. Nearly 40 teachers and more than 300 students, built 5,952 computers for Mississippi classrooms.

9. How did you motivate others to achieve high performance levels? How did you stimulate them to do better than they ever had before? Were there risks involved for the other people associated with you in this effort? How did you get them to take these risks?

Bringing people into a new initiative, especially one this large, was easy because the goal is seeable, doable, and tangible. We held conference call updates, used email, and I called many of them to update them. Communication is essential to fostering higher performance levels.

10. As best as you can remember, how would you describe your feelings at the onset of the project? How did you feel immediately after the project got underway? Midway through the effort? After it was concluded?

“Excited.” Providing access to information across the state, nation, and world, as well as opportunities to enhance classroom instruction, motivates all of us to do more for our future—our children.

11. How did you win others over to the project? What did you say or write to them? How did you build enthusiasm and excitement for the project among others?

I spoke to the Memphis Rotary Club in 2001. Much of my speech centered on how Mississippi was preparing for the future, how we were improving education and creating jobs. I explained the Computers in Classroom project and I got this question from one of the attendees, “So you mean that every student in public schools in Mississippi will have access to the same resources that I do at work or that my son has at college?” My response was, “Exactly.” This story says it all.

12. What particular strategies did you use to successfully implement the project? How did you gain the support of people in the organization who didn't report to you?

Communication, communication, communication...these are the keys to project success.

13. How did you show others by your own example, that you were serious about these values, beliefs, and standards? Describe the way you lead by example.

Over the years, education has always been my number one priority. I have read to students in schools, worked with the legislature to raise teacher pay, and brought about awareness of this project. Talking about leadership is good, but leading is better. Leading involves setting forth a vision (a significant goal), developing a strategy, fostering buy-in from stakeholders, and implementing the strategy.

14. What planning structures and organizing systems did you utilize to plan, organize, or manage the effort?

I convened a broad task force representing different fields of work from across Mississippi. Additionally, we used a working group approach to implement different elements of the strategy, including fundraising and procurement.

15. How did you communicate the project's accomplishments to the entire organization? Beyond the organization?

Repetition. Communicating with the press, staff, and participants is essential. Communication is the key to success. Without it nothing will happen...with communication the opportunities are endless.

16. In reflection, what were the elements of your leadership approach that were critical to the project's ultimate success?

Setting forth a vision, creating buy-in, communication, and execution—these are the steps that are essential to successful efforts.