

*Department of Education  
Press Conference  
July 2, 2001*

This year, the people of Mississippi – and the children of Mississippi – have been affected by a poorly performing economy and the resulting financial crunches.

The economy has affected every one of us, in many different ways. It has affected how we spend money, and how we budget money.

I have said for months now that we need to prioritize our spending in Mississippi, and in my mind there is no greater priority than education.

Our school districts across the state this year faced shortages of \$56.1 million for the fiscal year just ended.

The Legislature handled this problem by robbing Peter to pay Paul. They did not make education a priority. They did not focus on the most important aspect for the future of this great state.

On April 1 of this year, school districts were facing a fiscal year shortfall of more than \$14.3 million.

The districts were faced with a situation that forced them to consider increasing local millage or other means of building revenue.

They were forced to deal with a situation that should have been handled during the legislative session.

But, I am proud today to announce that we have been able to bring some relief to this shortfall.

This past Friday, June 29, I directed that \$10 million should be directed toward this shortfall.

These funds were reserved in February. Due to an increase in revenues, we were able to unreserved them and turn the money back over to the children of Mississippi.

This \$10 million will have a dramatic impact on our local school districts.

Because of this action, those districts are now facing a shortfall of \$3.3 million, rather than the more than \$14 million staring them in the face two months ago.

I have said it again and again – education is our first priority. That means giving our teachers, our administrators, our children the tools they need for success.

We owe them no less.

