

Executive Summary

Building Opportunity in Mississippi Through Higher Education

The Steering Committee foresees a future where Mississippians and their fellow Americans share a view of Mississippi as the state of promise and opportunity. Mississippi's Leadership Summit on Higher Education has worked hard to identify what all of higher education—public and private, two-year and four-year institutions—can do to advance the competitiveness of our state and to improve the quality of life of our people. Through this package of priorities and initiatives, our intention is to provide a shared framework for educational, economic, and social progress.

One: All Mississippi's children, their families, educators, business persons, professionals, the media, and communities will understand and embrace the value of education and training, both for their own personal accomplishment and to develop a more robust state economy.

- **Build public awareness.** *Mississippi should launch a broad public campaign directed to all segments of the population underscoring the importance of high school completion, advanced education, and lifelong learning.*

Two: All of Mississippi's children will start school ready to learn.

- **Mississippi should help expand and improve pre-kindergarten programs for children in all areas of the state.** *Mississippi's youngest citizens should enter school ready to interact with their peers and teachers, be eager to read, and be able to begin working with numbers. The state's colleges and universities should partner with schools, social service agencies, and providers; deploy college student volunteers; and work to establish pilot projects in selected school districts.*

Three: Mississippi will substantially **boost the quality of teaching and learning** in all elementary and secondary schools to better prepare more graduates who are ready to compete in the new economy.

- **Enhance school partnerships. Each college and university should establish three or more partnerships with school districts.** *Priority should be given to schools ranking lowest on the state's accreditation measures.*
- **Develop a comprehensive strategic plan for action research.** *College and university faculty should partner with school administrators and teachers to design and conduct research that will address real needs in the classroom.*
- **Boost Advanced Placement course offerings throughout the state.** *Mississippi's colleges and universities should develop a plan to help each Mississippi public school offer at least one AP course by the fall of 2002, and add one more each year for the next 10 years.*
- **Educate better teachers and school administrators—and work to retain them.** *Mississippi should redouble its efforts to strengthen teacher and school administrator (especially principals) induction, mentoring, and professional development; increase the supply of teachers in mathematics, science, and technology; ensure that all teachers appreciate and understand cultural diversity; make full use of the state's technology infrastructure to expand access to teacher and school administrator education courses; and consider developing a business plan for strengthening teacher supply and quality.*

Four: Mississippi will increase high school graduation rates and college participation and graduation rates at all schools, colleges, and universities.

- **Promote the college prep curriculum.** *The Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning, colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools, and the business community should partner to publicize and disseminate the college prep curriculum and encourage all high school students to complete it.*
- **Raise participation and graduation rates** in two-year colleges and universities, especially among first generation college students and African-American students.
- **Raise the number of college graduates in critical technical career fields** such as science, mathematics, computer science, and engineering. At the same time, the state should continue to cultivate its rich tradition in the arts, humanities, and the social sciences.

Five: Mississippi will increase participation in adult life-long learning, worker training, and professional development activities.

- **Boost part-time enrollments and access to adult education.** *Mississippi's two-year colleges need to evolve into truly comprehensive community colleges that train highly skilled workers in applied fields as well as serving a baccalaureate transfer function.*
- **Develop career and education pathway programs in high schools and community colleges.** *These pathways will link targeted education and training to work-based high school curricula and postsecondary certificates, associate degrees, and transfer to four-year programs.*
- **Encourage employers to make full use of employer-paid tuition benefits.**
- **Conduct a study of the state's human resource needs,** and reshape educational offerings and outreach strategies to address them.

Six: Mississippi will increase its investments in university-based research and development, and the higher education community will increase its efforts to address state and community economic needs and prepare students for careers in the new economy.

- **Continue to increase the state's scientific, technical, and research capacity** to attract and retain high technology industries in the new economy and reenergize Mississippi's traditional industries.
- **Develop proactive partnerships with business and industry** that will enable the state's colleges and universities to become full partners in economic development.
- **The state should consider matching private research investments** to support institutionally mission-driven research addressing state needs.

Sustaining Commitments and Strengthening Accountability for the Public Agenda: Mississippi's policymakers, educators, and citizens will have the information they need to gauge progress on this agenda for higher education.

- **Establish an education coordinating entity** to better align policies and practices across educational sectors. The body would be composed of the board chairs and chief executives of the Department of Education, the State Board for Community and Junior

Colleges, and the Institutions of Higher Learning, and representatives of Mississippi Independent colleges and universities.

- **Create a Mississippi Education Progress Board** to annually assess educational progress at all levels. This board should include the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the House Speaker, the House and Senate education committee chairs, business leaders, and the board chairs of the IHL, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, and the State Board of Education, as well as system customers.