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Mississippi Professional Education Association
MPE Journal Spring 2016

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Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.”

Encouraging words can uplift the soul! Giving someone encouragement or hope or confidence helps build positive relationships. We, as teachers, have inspired students by complimenting the child who is doing what has been asked in the way asked. Soon, others follow suit. Whether bragging on the way he is leading the line in the hall or how the child has stayed in the lines while coloring, those students seem to stand a little taller and put on a grin you cannot wipe off. That’s one classroom management strategy that almost always brings positive results.

Teachers not only bond with students, but they also bridge the gap between the home and community. Showing concern for others, regardless of their backgrounds, builds a community of respect and encouragement. For example, that might mean helping English Learners’ parents by explaining procedures or inviting them to assist with a class project. It could entail being purposeful in getting parents who might have experienced difficulty in school to help with a class party. It involves inviting caregivers to share their experiences with the class. Sending home positive notes about the child fosters confidence for the student and trust for the parents. Teachers build positive relationships among caregivers, the classroom, and the school through genuine efforts of involvement.

Administrators and community stakeholders, sometimes unknowingly, have a tremendous effect on the lives of teachers and students. Just a short note can uplift a teacher’s spirit. As a teacher, I have treasured every sticky note, card, and letter received. A parent of a Down’s syndrome student published her appreciation not only for me but for all her child’s teachers. Part of it reads “Seeing the hidden possibilities that are there and having enough faith and patience for him to learn and have achievements, and the understanding of people who are challenged on earth that are here… Thank you!” (I have this one laminated!) As encouraging words mean a lot to the receiver, the feeling is reciprocal when the school or district is recognized. Positive comments are an inspiration!

As school leaders impress students, students, too, have an impact on those around them. I was touched when a teacher intern asked students to journal how they would like to be remembered. Students’ responses included, “I want to be remembered for making people feel good inside. I want to make my neighborhood a better place. I want to spread God’s love with the world. I would love to be remembered as a person who completed community service… When people see you do community service; it inspires them to do the same.” How astounding!

In today’s taxing time of testing, teaching, and retesting, let’s continue to encourage one another. Who knows, if we do something to inspire others, perhaps it will incite others to pay it forward. After all, a good compliment can last a couple of months, at least, according to Mark Twain! Why not pay someone a compliment today?
MESSAGE FROM THE PAST-PRESIDENT

Angela Towers

It has been an honor to serve as your president this year. I challenged at the beginning of my term for us all to have vision and voice. The membership definitely accepted and abundantly exceeded my call. The advocates for education and the outcries on behalf of students and teachers were seen and heard all around the state. Although we experienced a huge blow with the failure of Initiative 42, we still have many things to celebrate and reasons to be proud of the work we have done as educators.

The Mississippi Professional Educators has continued its consistent growth over the years. This April, our membership totaled over 13,000 members. Our regional professional development trainings have also been very successful with great participation across the state. We are in the process of planning and offering more training according to the needs and interests indicated in the membership survey. We take special pride in providing information and professional development that will empower and strengthen the educational practices of Mississippi educators.

Secondly, our annual MPE Best Practices Symposium attendance was record-breaking this year. With over 350 educators in attendance to see and hear world-renowned educators Dr. Harry Wong and his lovely wife Dr. Rosemary Wong, it was a wonderful feeling to be in the presence of such passionate and enthusiastic educators. Other speakers and exhibitors also shared valuable information and provided needed motivation to end the school year.

One of the most important things I took away from the symposium was a quote in Dr. Wong’s newspaper, “There is never a shortage of love.” This resonated with me as I sat and reflected on the tough year we have endured with fighting for better educational conditions across the state and the educational funding our children so rightly deserve. As educators, we have to remember that even if there is a teacher shortage, shortage of state-of-the-art facilities, shortage of materials, shortage of technology, or shortage of funding, there is never a shortage of love from educators. We have always provided the love, care, understanding, and motivation for students. As a result they have been able to achieve and succeed with many shortages; however, I do believe that our voices cannot and will not go unheard much longer.

Again, I would like to thank the MPE Staff, board members, and general membership for a wonderful year. When it comes to my love and respect for the Mississippi Professional Educators and its members, there is no shortage. Have a blessed and wonderful summer.
Kelly Riley

It is April 18 as I sit down to write this message. I am reflecting on the incredible experiences of the past 10 days. Those of you who joined us at our 2016 Best Practices Symposium on April 16 experienced the excitement and engagement of Dr. Harry and Rosemary Wong. I found myself writing down “golden nuggets” from their keynote throughout the morning. Then, just five days later, I had the honor of attending Mississippi’s 2016 Administrator and Teacher of the Year Awards Program. The event is a favorite of mine each year, as it celebrates the incredible profession of education. This year’s event was even more special as MPE member Corlis Curry, principal of Lawhon Elementary in Tupelo, was honored as Mississippi’s 2016 Administrator of the Year and numerous MPE members were recognized as their respective district’s administrator or teacher of the year!

In addition to the Wongs being with us, another highlight of symposium was the election of our officers and new directors for the coming year. Dr. Lela Hale, Director of Clinical Experiences and Assistant Professor of Education at Blue Mountain College, will lead our association this year! We welcome Lisa Williamson, Julie Burton, Tamra Mills and Shannon Eubanks to our board. Visit page 11 to learn more about our newest board members. I would like to thank Donna Robbins (Past-President), Ken Basil (District 1), Mark Reddoch (District 5), and Regina Allen (District 7) for their commitment to MPE, as they rotated off of our board at symposium.

Your MPE Board of Directors is a volunteer board. They are not compensated for the endless hours they contribute to lead our association. Your directors will host their annual planning retreat in June to not only review and evaluate this year’s operations, but to plan for next year. We will announce our 2016-2017 regional trainings in July.

Please be sure to visit page 15 for an overview of several pieces of legislation passed during the recent 2016 Legislative Session, which wrapped up on April 21. You may also visit the “MPE News” section of our website (www.mpe.org) for our bill tracking spreadsheet, which provides a summary of all bills we monitored this session. Recently passed legislation will impact classrooms throughout our state next fall. Legislators are now home and I urge you to visit with your local representative and senator to share your thoughts on their votes on education legislation. You will find legislative contact information in the “Quick Links” section of our homepage.

As you look forward to summer and some time for yourself, I hope you will also be sure to take some time to reflect on your accomplishments this past year. Your efforts impacted your students’ lives in unforeseen ways. Likewise, what are you going to do differently next year? I encourage you to set aside time this summer for self-reflection and assessment, as it is so critical to your own professional growth.

As we wrap up this year, I would like to thank our MPE staff for the incredible work they do each day in our office to support you, our members, as well as me. “Thank you” is not enough, but I appreciate our team: Barbie Ferguson, Deputy Director; Kathy Goldsmith, Office Manager; Stephanie Miller, Accounts Manager; and, Jessica Ridgeway, Receptionist.

It seems as if our state has been in such turmoil recently based upon our differences. The tendency has been to identify or to classify others – whether by their political party, their religion, their lifestyle, or their race – rather than recognizing them as fellow Mississippians. As you well know, our public schools do not discriminate when it comes to our students. Our schools accept every student that walks through the door. I would like to close by sharing the following statement by FED UP with 50th: “Public Schools: Where it is a sincerely held moral conviction that EVERY student is valuable and deserves a quality education. Thank you Mississippi Public School Educators.”

Have a wonderful summer!
Good for us, Better for you!

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MISSISSIPPI PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS' CLASSROOM GRANT PROGRAM

MPE invites its members to apply for our classroom grant program to try out a new idea or buy the “extras” for an already great lesson plan or project.

Up to 16 $500 grants will be awarded to teachers or instructors to enhance their instructional program.

The deadline to apply is August 26, 2016. For more information, please visit our website at www.mpe.org
My personal philosophy about teaching is rooted in my ability to reach each and every student. If I am able to teach one child one thing each day, then at the end of the school year I can be confident that we have made incredible progress. However, if I manage to reach more than one child each day, the rewards begin to multiply and soon overflow. Let’s face it…we aren’t in this profession for the money. In education, our “reward” is student learning, achievement and success. THAT is what keeps us returning each year.

Spring is a magical time of year; this is when we start to see the fruits of our labor come to life. Why we do what we do becomes more evident with every passing day. We work tirelessly to see that “light bulb” moment, to hear a student recite the alphabet, count to 100, master their sight word list, solve a mathematical equation or write a thoughtful essay. When these moments occur, it feels like you’ve won the lottery!

Teachers are a rare and special breed. We are easy to please and possess such special characteristics…like those “bossy qualities.” I was once told that “bossiness” is just good leadership qualities on display, or at least that’s what I like to tell my family when they tell me I’m being bossy. We don’t need medals or accolades, we don’t do this work for the rewards, but this job certainly isn’t shy of them.

A sweet reward for me is when I run into former students; they envelop me in a hug and begin to reminisce about their experience in my class. Nothing is more rewarding than when they share how much they learned, the fun we had and how I was their favorite teacher. It’s so touching when parents request their child to be in my class because of the wonderful experience they had with other children or receiving an invitation to graduation. It’s moments like these that give teachers such a feeling of gratitude knowing that you’ve played an instrumental role in their lives; your heart feels so full. God blesses us with the gift of teaching. It is up to us to decide what we do with that gift…but one thing I know is true, teaching is the gift that keeps on giving.
Congratulations to the following recipients of MPE’s 2016 Graduate Scholarship Award. Each member will receive $1,000 towards their graduate studies.

- Meghan Cates
  William Carey University
- Penny Hill
  Mississippi State University
- Christy Lewis
  William Carey University
- Kristi McMillan
  William Carey University
- Katie Moore
  William Carey University
- Leigh Anne Newton
  University of Mississippi
- Stephanie Querns
  University of Southern Mississippi
- Jeannie Pruitt
  William Carey University
- Allison Sabbatini
  William Carey University
- Terri Thornton
  William Carey University
The Mississippi Department of Education announced April 14 that Corlis Curry, principal of Lawhon Elementary in Tupelo, is Mississippi’s 2016 Administrator of the Year. Corlis has been a member of MPE since 2010. As Mississippi’s Administrator of the Year, Corlis receives a one-time $5,000 salary stipend. She will also share her expertise through various presentations and activities throughout the state.

Curry has served as principal of Lawhon Elementary School since 2012. After teaching fifth grade in Lee County Schools and seventh grade in Nettleton Schools, she taught English at Tupelo High School for seven years. She has also worked as an administrator in the Amory School District. Curry will serve as Tupelo’s Director of Federal Programs for the 2016-2017 school year.

Kelleigh McLeod of Northside Elementary in Clinton was recognized this past January as one of the Greater Jackson Chamber Partnership’s Teachers of the Year! She was selected from among all public, private and parochial K-12 schools in the Jackson metro area. The program showcases some of the top educational talent in metro area schools. Kelleigh has been a member of MPE since 2009.

Melanie Pittman, a seventh grade math teacher at Carver Middle School in Meridian, has been selected as Teacher Intern of the Year by the National Association for Alternative Certification. The association bestows this prestigious award each year on three new teachers from across the nation in recognition of demonstrating successful teaching and contributions to the field in their early years as educators. In her second year at Carver Middle School, Pittman served as a bank branch manager prior to becoming a teacher. A member of MPE since 2014, she will graduate in May from Mississippi State University with a master of arts in teaching.

MPE Executive Director Kelly Riley was honored by the Mississippi School Boards Association (MSBA) in February with the association’s “Friend of MSBA” award. Riley was recognized for her dedication and commitment to Mississippi’s children through advocacy, leadership training, and support to school board members. Riley spoke at the association’s Awards Celebration Luncheon, encouraging board members to understand the value of teacher appreciation efforts at the local level.
LISA WILLIAMSON - DISTRICT 1
Lisa has served as principal of South Pontotoc Elementary School since 2012. Prior to becoming an administrator, she served as a classroom teacher for 23 years. Lisa earned both her Bachelor of Science and her Master in Elementary Education from Mississippi College. She will earn her Specialist in Education from William Carey University in August 2016. Lisa has been a member of MPE since 1990.

JULIE BURTON - DISTRICT 3
Julie serves as the literacy coach at Booker T. Washington International Studies Magnet School in Clarksdale. Prior to this, she served as a first grade teacher at Kirkpatrick Elementary in Clarksdale. Julie earned both her Bachelor of Science and her Master in Elementary Education from Delta State University. A mentor teacher for her district, she is pursuing National Board Certification. Julie has been a member of MPE since 2008.

TAMRA MILLS - DISTRICT 5
Completing her 20th year of teaching elementary, Tamra currently serves as the 4th grade Language Arts chair at Newton County Elementary. She has served as an adjunct professor at Mississippi State University where she earned both her Bachelor of Science and her Master in Elementary Education. Tamra earned her National Board Certification in 2003 and recertified in 2013. A member of MPE since 2008, she also serves as an MPE Building Representative.

SHANNON EUBANKS - DISTRICT 7
Shannon has served as principal of Enterprise Attendance Center in Lincoln County since 2004. After receiving his Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education from Mississippi State University, he earned both his Master and his Specialist in Educational Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi. Prior to becoming an administrator, Shannon taught high school mathematics and sciences. A member of MPE since 2001, he also serves as an MPE Building Representative.
MPE elected its 2016-2017 officers and new board members at its 2016 Best Practices Symposium held April 9 at the Jackson Hilton. Those elected as officers are: President, Dr. Lela Hale, Assistant Professor of Education at Blue Mountain College; President-elect, Dr. Brad Johns, Math teacher at McLaurin High School; Secretary-Treasurer, Cheryl Howard, SPED inclusion teacher at Quitman County Elementary; and, Past-President, Angela Towers, Principal at Cypress Park Elementary. Members elected for three-year terms to the Board of Directors are: District 1, Lisa Williamson; District 3, Julie Burton; District 5, Tamra Mills; and District 7, Shannon Eubanks.

(From left, front) Lori Brennan, Julie Burton, Angela Towers, Dr. Lela Hale, Timeka Thomas, Cheryl Howard and Phlene Allen. (From left, back) Devin Walsh, Spence Andrews, Dr. Brad Johns, Jason Ross, Shannon Eubanks, Anjanette Powers, Stephanie Bowlin, Tamra Mills and Lisa Williamson.

**Recruitment Incentives**

MPE’s recruitment incentives provide a great way for you to earn a free membership, as well as a little extra money. You earn a free year’s membership for simply recruiting five new members and you earn money for each new member recruited after five. Encourage your professional co-workers and friends to join the premiere organization for professional educators in Mississippi.

- Five new members = one year’s free membership
- 6-9 new members = one year’s membership + $10 per member*
- 10-14 new members = one year’s membership + $15 per member*
- 15+ new members = one year’s membership + $20 per member*

You will receive $5 per student member recruited.

Recruitment bonus checks will be awarded at the end of each quarter, with the first quarter beginning July 1 and ending September 30. Credit will be given for each new member who joins or re-joins** between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017. Free memberships will be credited towards the next year’s membership.

* credit will be given for each additional member after 5
** member must have previously been made inactive for a period of three months or more
GENERAL BILL HIGHLIGHTS

n SB 2161 (Charter Schools): Provides technical amendments to the Charter Schools Act of 2013. SB 2161 continues to require local board approval for a charter to locate in an “A,” “B,” or “C” district, but allows students in “C,” “D,” and “F” districts to cross district lines to enroll in charter schools. State and local funding will follow the student. SB 2161 also allows charter teachers three years to earn their certification and charter teachers may be members of PERS. (Approved by the governor)

n SB 2438 (Appointed Superintendents): Requires all superintendents of education to be appointed after January 1, 2019. (Approved by the governor)

n HB 33 (SPED Vouchers): Amends the Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act (i.e., SPED vouchers) to revise the definition of “eligible student” to include those with an active IEP in the past five years, rather than the past 18 months as currently provided for in law. (Approved by the governor)

n HB 200 (EEF Funds for State Special Schools): HB 200 provides education enhancement fund procurement cards (i.e., classroom supply funds) for teachers at the state’s four special schools (Mississippi School for the Blind, Mississippi School for the Deaf, Mississippi School for the Arts, and Mississippi School for Math and Science). (Approved by the governor)

n HB 207 (NBCT Reimbursement): Reimburses educators undergoing National Board Certification for completion of each of the 4 component assessments of certification, rather than receiving a one-time reimbursement as current law provides. HB 207 also provides an additional $4,000 annual salary supplement to NBCTs who teach in one of the following counties: Claiborne, Adams, Jefferson, Wilkinson, Amite, Bolivar, Coahoma, Leflore, Quitman, Sharkey, Issaquena, Sunflower or Washington. (Approved by the governor)

n HB 1643 (K-12 FY 2017 Appropriation): HB 1643 provides level funding (i.e., same level as this year) for the MAEP, which means the formula will be underfunded by approximately $170 million. Funding for classroom supplies, as well as the literacy initiative, will also remain level. The Mississippi Schools for the Blind and Deaf will be cut by approximately $300,000. Support for the National Board Certification Program is fully funded. General Education is reduced by $2.7 million. Early childhood education is cut by $2 million, with funding for the Mississippi Building Blocks pre-K program totally cut and funding for the early childhood collaborations increased by $1 million.

The following administrative consolidations will be implemented:

n HB 926 – Holmes County School District and Durant Public School District effective July 1, 2018

n HB 987 – Leflore County School District and Greenwood Municipal Separate School District effective July 1, 2019

n HB 991 – Creates the Commission on Chickasaw County Consolidated School District Structure to recommend how the Houston, Okolona and Chickasaw County districts can be consolidated into one district. The Commission shall submit its findings by December 1, 2016.

n SB 2495 – Montgomery County School District and Winona Municipal Separate School District effective July 1, 2018

n SB 2500 – Creates the Commission on Administrative Consolidation of the Lumberton Public School District to recommend how to abolish the Lumberton School District and disperse its students and resources to the Lamar County and Poplarville school districts. The Commission shall submit its recommendations by December 1, 2017.
Congratulations to the recipients of MPE’s 2016 Undergraduate Scholarship Award. Each student member was awarded a scholarship in the amount of $500.

Christy Buckley
William Carey University

Kineu Donald
Alcorn State University

Meghan Malone
Belhaven University

Calli Musselwhite
Delta State University

Devon Napps
Mississippi State University

Megan Waguespack
University of Southern Mississippi

Pollyann Watters
Mississippi College

Mackenzie Whaley
Blue Mountain College
Hello happily retired members---and those who want to be.

We are again at that time in the school year when all eyes are on the legislature. PERS is directly affected by HB 899 because that bill represents technical corrections that the PERS Board had requested since 2012. The bill does not expand benefits, have anything to do with COLA nor does it change vesting. Retired teachers would be affected by SB 2161 because it allows charter school teachers to be enrolled in PERS. This would mean retired teachers who draw PERS benefits could not teach full time in charter schools as they can in independent schools in our state.

Please remember as retired teachers we are also a vital part of MPE and can be a member very economically and easily. The lifetime membership is a one-time fee of $70. This gives you all the benefits of MPE except the liability insurance. If you are going to continue to work part time, you would want to have the part-time membership, which costs $60.

Please remember to update your email address with the office if it has changed. You don’t want to miss any of the informative emails our director, Kelly Riley, sends out to members and at times we have emails directly related to retirees and our benefits.

I have received requests concerning information on renewing our educator licenses. It is a very simple procedure. Don’t hesitate to contact me if you have questions. You may email me at phileneallen@bell-south.net or call 662-588-9011.

Philene Allen
MPE Board of Directors, Retirees

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I have often promoted the idea of schools developing and encouraging teacher leaders. Now, the Mississippi Department of Education, in collaboration with teachers, administrators and superintendents, is working to provide a framework for educators on how to implement a successful teacher leadership program.

I am pleased to share with you that the first Teacher Leadership Initiative meeting took place on April 6. During that meeting, participants developed a definition for teacher leadership in Mississippi. They agreed that it is “the process by which professional educators cultivate their voice in leadership at the classroom, school, district, state or national levels in order to advance the profession, improve educator effectiveness, engage and shape policy, and increase access and equity to great teaching and learning for all students.”

That is a powerful statement when you think about it. For some teachers, it will be a change. Teachers, at their best, are often selfless individuals who seek to promote the achievement of their students, but they often do it in a way that doesn’t draw attention outside of the classroom. Teacher leaders are empowered to advocate on behalf of their profession and the well-being of their students in an engaging and impactful way. This requires us to step outside of our comfort zones if we truly want to make a difference for children.

In the absence of your voices in the schools, districts, state and nation, other voices will start to dominate the conversations. If anyone should speak up on behalf of public education, it should be you. Outside of parents or caregivers, you spend the most time with students each day. You know their needs. You know your needs.

But many of you may say, “I don’t feel comfortable doing that. I don’t know how I can do that.” This is where the work of the Teacher Leadership Initiative comes into play. The main purpose of this work is to find out what’s hindering the development of teacher leadership in Mississippi and early indications show that the lack of a working model for schools to follow is critical.

Through a series of meetings with a committee of educators, we want to create a shared vision for teacher leadership in the state, develop a model, and begin the initial planning for a teacher leadership taskforce. A second planning meeting has been scheduled for May with a full taskforce meeting tentatively planned for July. I will be sure to keep you informed of the important work of this group.

In closing, I want to thank you for the incredible work you do each day to challenge, nurture and support our students across this state. We are on the right path to improving student achievement and it’s because of you. Please know that I value your commitment to the profession and I will continue to work on behalf of students. I wish you the best for the rest of the school year and I hope you take the summer to rest, refresh and recharge.
It is hard to believe that I have been with the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) for almost six months. I am blessed with a team of professionals who work collaboratively to make a positive difference.

In my six months with MCCB, it has been my privilege to meet with various leaders from both the public and private sectors. A common theme among leaders is the need for collaborative efforts across all sectors to strengthen Mississippi. I am confident a culture of working as one united force to achieve common outcomes will move our state in a positive direction. State agencies and education entities are already having collaborative conversations for improved efficiency and effectiveness. Key partnerships between community colleges and those with K-12, universities, industry, state agencies and local organizations provide a focused and unified effort resulting in success.

One of many examples is earlier this year when the Education Achievement Council created a task force to study Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment. The task force membership includes K-12, community college, and university representatives. In 2015, 12,000 high school students enrolled in dual enrollment community college courses to receive postsecondary credit. This number is an increase of more than 6,100 students since 2013. Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to earn college credit, resulting in a significant number of postsecondary credits completed by the time the student receives a high school diploma. The impact is one of significant cost savings and a faster pathway to a college credential.

Our partners are currently examining best practices and dual credit models in which high school students enroll in a college course to earn both high school and college credit as the most efficient and effective pathway to completion. Based on Mississippi’s workforce needs, our partnership will expand career and technical dual credit opportunities as a means of building the workforce pipeline early. High school students who participate in dual credit as early as possible save the most money and time AND are work-ready at an earlier rate compared to those who do not participate in the program.

The task force has been charged with examining innovative strategies to further strengthen and build this program and is scheduled to present recommendations to the EAC in the fall.

By the time you receive this edition of the Journal, hopefully the Legislature will have adjourned for the year. As I write this, FY 2017 budgets are heading towards the final stages of the legislative process and much work is still yet to be done. What I can tell you is that revenue projections for FY 2016 continue to fall below the estimates that impact our respective budgets. Hopefully as we move into the future, the state’s economic projections will be met and additional funding can be provided to the three educational entities.

As we move towards the summer, I hope that each of you can enjoy a summer break. As a former community college instructor, administrator, and president, I recognize the hours upon hours that you put into the classroom and also invest into students. Thank you for the great job that each one of you provides to your school, community college, or university!
2014-2015 CLASSROOM GRANT RECIPIENTS

MPE invites its members to apply for classroom grant funding each year to try out a new idea or buy the “extras” for an already great lesson plan or project. Thirty-five members submitted applications for the 2014-2015 school year, with sixteen members receiving grants of up to $500 for their class projects and instructional program. We are pleased to spotlight several of the grants below for your enjoyment, as well as your reference for ideas for your own classroom.

Tracie L Newell
Saltillo Primary - 2nd Grade
Between the Lions-Friends Near and Far

I would like to thank MPE for funding the grant that allowed Ms. Keri Horn to come to Saltillo Primary School as our culminating project for our Friendship Unit. Our 2nd grade team of teachers wanted a new way to show our students how to treat one another. Our 2nd graders were able to see a skit that Ms. Horn created based on friendship. The value of treating others the way one wants to be treated was reiterated to all of us. The 2nd graders and teachers alike enjoyed the drama that Ms. Horn performed and we hope that she will be able to come back to Saltillo Primary School soon.

Keri McRaney
Simpson Central School – 2nd-6th Grades, Gifted
Welcome to the Game of Chess

Thanks to the generosity of MPE, my gifted students in second through sixth grades were able to engage in the game of chess. Second, third, and fourth grade students learned how to play the game with the use of Welcome to the Game of Chess workbooks and the use of a demonstration board. Fifth and sixth grade students engaged in critical thinking while learning tactics to improve their skill through the use of Welcome to Chess Ideas and Welcome to Checkmate books. The game of chess allowed students to discuss strategy, improve skill and problem solving, and practice good sportsmanship through fun competition.
Stephanie Parrish  
Hazlehurst School District - 11th-12th Grades  
Breast Cancer Awareness

My students and I express our gratitude to the Mississippi Professional Educators for our grant. Our high school 11th and 12th grade young ladies were able to be a part of very informative project. Some of our young students were able to enhance their knowledge of the importance of breast health and others who knew little gained invaluable knowledge. Our Breast Cancer Awareness event has been a tradition for high school young ladies since the year I became a school nurse in 2002. Through the support of MPE, we were able to continue the program this year.

Jeanifer Pearson, Ph.D.  
Oak Park Elementary- Grades 2-5, Gifted Studies  
Read to Succeed

I would like to express a sincere thank you for funding the classroom grant program. My first goal was to establish a classroom set of books for each grade level that I currently teach that can be utilized for years to come. My second goal was to motivate students to read by providing materials that were relevant and interesting. Finally, the final goal was to motivate and encourage students to read books that would allow for healthy debates within the classroom. The grant provided funding to purchase over 100 nonfiction and fiction books that will be utilized in the gifted classroom for many years.

Cindy Cockrell  
Mize Elementary - 2nd Grade Reading  
The Reader’s Theatre

The Reader’s Theatre grant was a great success. The students enjoyed reading in small groups, practicing together and performing for peers. The goals were to increase comprehension and fluency with a different approach. Both goals were accomplished and students were excited to perform. A special thanks to MPE for funding the Reader’s Theatre grant.
Our university system will award more than 10,600 bachelor’s, master’s, specialist, and doctoral degrees in spring commencement ceremonies held on campuses between late April and late May. It is difficult in mere words to express enough appreciation for the difference you have made in helping students reach this milestone and the difference you will continue to make as they take the lessons you have taught them into the next phase of their lives.

The knowledge gained through your course design and instruction will translate into the skills needed to be successful in the workforce. Regardless of the major, students learn skills and develop traits that transcend a particular job, such as how to think critically; how to research, discern and communicate information; and how to construct a compelling argument. When you gave them team assignments requiring them to work with fellow students, they learned the importance of responsibility and collaboration. These are important lessons, regardless of what field a student enters after graduation.

Some of the most important skills they have learned in your classroom often come from the example you set for them. When you set high expectations for your students, they learn important lessons about hard work and persistence. When you approach students each day with a positive, engaging attitude, it builds confidence and a belief that they can achieve their goals. When they see you encourage open, honest and respectful dialogue, they learn the importance of listening to all voices, even if they do not share the same background, views or ideas with the speaker.

The importance of hearing all voices has been illuminated by the national coverage of recent events on university campuses across the country. It is critical that students learn to express themselves with passion, but without prejudice, as they evolve from student to professional to leader in their fields and communities. Students must also learn that the right to be heard and respected comes with a responsibility to listen with an open mind and to respect the viewpoints and ideas of others.

While many of these lessons may not be reflected in a college transcript, they will be evident in each day of a student’s life after graduation. Future success certainly depends on the intellectual skills that separate an engineer from a botanist, but also as important are the lessons mentioned above that all students should acquire before graduation. The expectations, course design, and example you have set for them in your classroom have helped build essential skills, giving them a powerful arsenal for success in the future.

I hope you will take time during the summer months to reflect, restore and renew. Whether you have penciled in seeking a higher degree, traveling for research or pleasure, or spending time with family, I hope you have a summer filled with rich experiences that will rejuvenate you for the fall. I also hope you take great pride in knowing that you have made a difference in the lives of these graduates and that almost assuredly one of them will change the world. When that one reflects on all those who were a part of the journey, I am certain that your name will be remembered with gratitude and appreciation.
The Mississippi Professional Educators would like to thank our generous sponsors and vendors who contributed to this year’s symposium.
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