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MPE Journal is published three times annually by the Mississippi Professional Educators, Kelly Riley, Publisher.

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My favorite education quote – *Let us remember: one book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.* - Malala Yousafzai

Becoming a member of Mississippi Professional Educators has proven to be one of the greatest decisions of my career. Early in my career MPE was a means to acquire classroom liability insurance. At the time I said, “this is what new teachers are concerned about, right?” Unbeknownst to me, that in 1991 Mississippi Professional Educators would grow to become a beacon of hope to educators and future educators as an outstanding organization that offers scholarships to help the next generation of highly qualified staff. MPE also offers National Board Renewal scholarships and non-certified scholarships. We also offer free staff development sessions for our members, with free CEU credits. We also offer rewards for recruiting. Our Executive Director sends us a very informative weekly email keeping us abreast of legislative issues in education, as well as informing us of career opportunities and spotlighting members across the state. MPE doesn’t just take your money for dues, we invest it back into YOU! So please, enjoy the perks of your great organization. Your board members take great pride in planning and developing a camaraderie of teachers across this state.

Becoming a board member was something far beyond my comfort zone, but MPE offered me the opportunity to give back to my organization in the decision making process for our fellow members. We share the opportunity to plan for you, our dedicated members.

I am honored and rewarded with the task of being your President. I am so glad to have the privilege. I hope to see our membership grow by hundredfold this year. I challenge each member to recruit one educator. WOW, look at what we could do!

Mentoring new teachers is my platform as President this year. Mentoring new teachers is my passion. Mentoring new teachers is very dear to my heart because I had three special ladies that took me under their wings my first year and led me, groomed me into the teacher that I am today. We became much more than mentor/mentee friends; we became lifelong friends. Sherry recruited me as an MPE member and every year Sherry, Mabel, Judy and I would attend the MPE Symposium. It served several purposes—a professional journey with many chapters and a girls’ trip. Mabel and Judy retired, but continued to be involved in “keeping up with the life of a teacher.” They were all here with me the year I became a board member, another chapter in our lives as friends and teachers. Since that year, my dear friend Judy has passed away and Mabel’s eyesight has worsened. I will always remember my mentors. We shared many stories, laughs, lessons and tears. A good mentor is someone you never forget. I was blessed with three. I make it my business every year to befriend the new teachers and some not so new to the profession, to offer guidance and leadership. To many I am known as their “other mother” and to some their “Delta Momma.” Why not make it your business to be someone’s mentor and continue your educational journey?
What a wonderful symposium we just recently attended. Hats off to Kelly and the entire MPE staff for making this year’s symposium one of the best. This year marks the beginning of my end on the MPE board. It has been a privilege to serve on this board for the past six years. We have come so far in that length of time. We recently saw our 14,000th member join MPE. We continue to be the largest professional organization for teachers in Mississippi.

There were two major changes that have occurred during my time on the board. First, we have greatly increased the number of grants and scholarships given to our members each year. When I was in graduate school, I had to seek out scholarships to help me pay for the degree that I was seeking. That search inspired me to want to help people in similar situations and thus push our board in the direction to help as many as possible achieve their dream in obtaining a degree or classroom grant. That is what I hope to be most remembered for.

Second, as I think back over my time on the board, we have also moved through a transitional time of local, in-state keynote speakers to those on a national stage. I believe that this has not only helped us improve our numbers at our yearly symposium but also improved the knowledge that we take back to our classrooms. Speakers such as Dr. Harry Wong, Dr. Eric Jensen, and Stacey Bess, among others, have given us better insight into our teaching practice.

We have also been able to provide professional development though our regional professional development workshops. These workshops have cemented a very high standard for others to follow. We are the leader in professional development opportunities provided by a professional organization to its members. It makes me proud that we have developed this opportunity during my time on the board. I have personally attended several of these professional development trainings and I can personally say that they were all top notch.

None of this would have been possible if it were not for the leadership of our MPE Executive Director, Kelly Riley, and her staff. Each of them does an incredible job. Barbie, Stephanie, Kathy, and Jessica all deserve a round of applause for the job that they do. Each of them is top notch.

In closing, please know that MPE holds a special place in my heart. I will always cherish the memories of the work we have accomplished these past six years. I hope each of you continues to strive to provide the best education for your students while always providing yourself with time to reflect on what you do and how you can do it better. Enjoy your summer; August will be here before you know it.
Kelly Riley

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” — Maimonides

The above quote is one of my favorites. I first heard it as a high school sophomore at a youth leadership summit. It continues to resonate with me and I believe it exemplifies the life-changing work of educators throughout Mississippi. What you teach your students can impact them—can feed them—for the rest of their lives. I hope your students left your classroom “full” but yearning for more as school dismissed for the summer.

The 2018 Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature will most likely be remembered more for legislation that did not pass, rather than what did pass. Vouchers and a new education funding formula were both killed, in large part because of educators reaching out and sharing their concerns with the bills with their legislators. While legislators increased funding for the MAEP funding formula by $3.1 million for the 2018-2019 School Year, the formula will be underfunded by approximately $240 million next year. The legislature provided an additional $2.5 million for early childhood education/pre-K, as well as an additional $4.9 million for the School Recognition Program.

Educators were engaged with their legislators this year and it truly made a difference. One message sent to legislators this year was the #BlueForMSTeachers movement, which grew from several social media posts by MPE’s own Chris Chism regarding his frustration with state leaders’ push for school choice. MPE expanded Chris’s #BlueForMSTeachers hashtag to start a Blue Fridays movement, in which we asked educators and concerned citizens to wear blue each Friday throughout the legislative session and to share pictures of their doing so on social media with the hashtag #BlueForMSTeachers. The first Friday we did this, social media exploded with pictures from around the state. If your school or community did not participate in Blue Fridays this year, you will have the opportunity to do so next year.

I am pleased to announce that we will offer a new scholarship benefit for our members pursuing National Board Certification. While we have provided scholarships for members pursuing renewal of their National Board Certification, we have not offered scholarships for candidates seeking initial certification, as the state reimburses them for completion of each of the four component assessments. Due to increased inquiries regarding such assistance, your MPE Board of Directors approved our offering ten $475 scholarships for initial National Board candidates. This is another example of MPE constantly striving to meet our members’ needs.

Even in the midst of torrential weather, nearly 250 educators joined us on April 14 for our 2018 Best Practices Symposium featuring Stacey Bess. Please see pages 12 through 13 for highlights of the day. It was a wonderful day full of encouragement for our guests. Mark your calendar for March 30, 2019, as Gerry Brooks will provide the keynote at our 2019 Best Practices Symposium!

Your MPE Board of Directors works diligently on behalf of our association and our members. We are honored to welcome Jennifer Gaston, Emily Edgar, Chris Chism, and Amanda Cummings to the board. You may read more about them on page 10. As Dr. Lela Hale, Timeka Thomas, Spence Andrews, and Stephanie Bowlin rotate off of our board, we thank them for their invaluable service to MPE.

Enjoy your summer! Whatever your plans, please take some well-deserved time for yourself!
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 40 $1,000 grants will be awarded to teachers or instructors to enhance their instructional program. The deadline to apply is August 24, 2018. For more information, please visit our website at www.mpe.org

HELP US KEEP YOUR MEMBERSHIP PROFILE UP-TO-DATE!

Have you recently moved, changed your last name or teaching assignment? Do you need to update your phone or email address? Visit www.mpe.org or call 1-800-523-0269 and update your membership profile so that we have the most up-to-date contact information for you.

Have you retired?

If you have retired, please contact our office and let us know. Retired membership in MPE is just $10 per year, or a one-time charge of $70 for a Lifetime Retiree membership. Retired membership includes the MPE Journal 3x per year, discounted rates on long-term care, auto/home insurance, and dental and vision insurance. Additionally, many of our retired members join us for our annual symposium. As a retired member, you will continue to receive priority registration at a discounted rate.
As this school year draws to an end, many of us will take the time to reflect, regroup, and rejuvenate. I believe that all three of those are needed this year more than ever. It has been a very tumultuous year for educators on every level. Nationally, with the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, educators have reflected on the “what if?” What if I had been a teacher there? What if it happened at my school? I’m sure everyone in education would not hesitate to protect the students in their care; but I’m also sure everyone is second-guessing security measures, etc. Now the discussion regarding arming teachers has begun and educators are divided on this issue. It is important that all educators take the time to review their own security plans and do what is best and safest for our students.

More locally, the fight for education funding continues to be a hot topic in Mississippi. With the legislature trying to recreate a funding formula, legislators and school districts have become divisive in this fight. However, as those in the trenches, we need to regroup, determine what is best for the students, and continue to provide an amazing education for those who depend on us. Our students do not understand what is happening at the Capitol; they only understand what is happening in their classrooms. It is up to us to make sure they are receiving the best education our awesome teachers can provide. Although many educators look at under-funding as under-valuing education, those of us who are passionate about teaching know we will never make the list of top-paying professionals. However, when that kindergartener hugs you and tells you she will miss seeing you every day, or that senior gives you a high-five and thanks you for helping him walk across that stage, you have won the education lottery. Those moments are priceless. So as you regroup, focus on the positives in the thirty faces that depend on you daily.

As many of you are counting down the days to summer, please remember to rejuvenate, both on the weekends and over the summer. When we are tired, our teaching reflects that fatigue. Even teachers need those brain breaks that are recommended for students. Take the time to enjoy the sun and beautiful weather on the weekends. Walk away from those papers at least once and take time for yourself. The next few weeks will pass by in a whirlwind of testing, field trips, school programs, and graduations. Make sure that you are still standing at the end of that chaotic time, then enjoy your break before facing it all again in August!

I’ve been an educator for twenty years, and every year I say, “This was such a crazy year!” Yet every year, I have grown and become better for it. I cannot imagine any other profession as rewarding as teaching. Now to reflect, regroup, and rejuvenate! Happy Summer!

Don’t Forget the Three Rs!

Lori Brennan, MPE Board of Directors
2018 GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Laurie Alford
Mississippi College

Missy Barham
William Carey University

Rose Cherie Bowe
University of Southern Mississippi

Shon Bullen
William Carey University

Meghan Cates
William Carey University

Ginnie Curtis
William Carey University

Fonda Dickinson
William Carey University

Mary Dunaway
Mississippi College

Trisha Gilbreath
University of Mississippi

Alexis Grey
William Carey University

Lamenda Hase
University of Southern Mississippi

Julie Ingram
Belhaven University

Amy Massey
Mississippi State University

Leigh Anne Newton
University of Mississippi

Lisa Pruitt
Belhaven University

Tricia Stoll
William Carey University

Angela Sykes
Delta State University

Derricka Thomas
William Carey University

LaVonda White
University of Mississippi

Kristen Zemek
University of Mississippi
JENNIFER GASTON - DISTRICT 2

Jennifer is a middle school math teacher at Coffeeville Elementary. A member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Mississippi Teacher Council, Jennifer served on MDE’s 2016 Exemplar Lesson Plan Writing Committee. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Accountancy from the University of Mississippi and her Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from Arkansas State University. She earned her teacher certification via Teach Mississippi Institute’s alternate route program. Jennifer has been a member of MPE since 2014.

EMILY EDGAR - DISTRICT 4

Emily is an English teacher at New Hope High School in Lowndes County. She has also taught in Madison County and Oxford, as well as Manizales, Colombia. A teacher consultant for the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute at Mississippi State University, Emily also serves as Director of Membership for the Mississippi Reading Association. She earned both her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Mississippi. Emily has been a member of MPE since 2013.

CHRIS CHISM - DISTRICT 6

Chris has served as principal of Pearl High School since 2016. He has also served as an administrator at Lafayette Middle School and New Albany High School. Prior to entering administration, he taught and coached at the high school level. He was honored as Pearl Public School District’s 2017-2018 Administrator of the Year. Chris earned his Bachelor of Science from Mississippi State University and his Master of Education from the University of Mississippi. He has been a member of MPE since 2001.

AMANDA CUMMINGS - DISTRICT 8

Amanda has taught third grade at Magnolia Park Elementary in Ocean Springs since 2009. Prior to this, she taught at Quitman County Elementary. In addition to serving as grade level chair at Magnolia Park, Amanda mentors first year teachers. She earned both her Bachelor of Arts in Education and her Master of Education from the University of Mississippi. She has been a member of MPE since 2004.
ELLISON EARNED DOCTORATE

Angela Ellison earned her Ph.D. in Special Education with an emphasis in Gifted Education from the University of Southern Mississippi in December 2017. As a teacher and Literacy Trainer at North Pike High School in the North Pike School District, Ellison has been a member of MPE since 2005.

KILLEBREW HONORED AS MILKEN EDUCATOR

Robyn Killebrew, principal of Pass Christian High School, received the 2017 Milken Educator Award during a surprise announcement at the school this past January. The only recipient in Mississippi this year, she received a $25,000 cash prize. Killebrew is one of 40 honorees nationwide to receive the award, which is hailed as the “Oscars of Teaching.” With the Pass Christian schools for the last ten years, Killebrew has served as high school principal for four years. She has been a member of MPE since 2008.

MPE MEMBERS HONORED AS CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT FINALISTS FOR MISSISSIPPI TEACHER OF THE YEAR

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) recognized two MPE members among four educators honored in April as Congressional District finalists for the 2018 Mississippi Teacher of the Year.

Jana Comer of Brandon Middle School was honored as Congressional District 3 Finalist. She teaches 8th grade English/Language Arts. Comer has been a member of MPE since 2015.

Leigh Ann Davis of the Middle School of Poplarville was honored as Congressional District 4 Finalist. She teaches ICT II, Computer Discovery, and Science. Davis has been a member of MPE since 2008.

JOHNSON HONORED BY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jennifer Leigh Johnson of Puckett High School has been named Mississippi’s outstanding history teacher by the Mississippi Historical Society. She received the John K. Bettersworth Award on March 3 during the society’s annual meeting in Jackson. Johnson has been a member of MPE since 2015.

FEHRS NAMED OUTSTANDING CITIZENS

Congratulations to Dave and Mary Fehr, the directors of Clinton High School’s Attaché Show Choir, on winning the Outstanding Citizens of the Year award from the Clinton Chamber of Commerce this past January. The Fehrs were recognized for their 25 years of service to the children and families of Clinton and for consistent excellence on the local, state, and national levels. Dave has been a member of MPE since 1994, while Mary has been a member since 2001.

SHIKLE HONORED BY SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

Ginny Shikle of Center Hill High School in Olive Branch was named the JoAnn Sellers Newspaper Adviser of the Year at the Mississippi Scholastic Press Association’s state convention on March 27. She is a National Board Certified Teacher, a nationally Certified Journalism Educator, a 2014 Reynolds Institute Fellow at Arizona State University, and was also named Mississippi’s Newspaper Adviser of the Year in 2015. At CHHS, she is co-adviser of The Pony Express. Shikle has been a member of MPE since 2013.
MPE elected its 2018-2019 officers and new board members at its 2018 Best Practices Symposium held April 14 at the Jackson Hilton. Those elected as officers are: President, Cheryl Howard, PreK Inclusion Teacher at Quitman County Elementary; President-elect, Lori Brennan, Literacy Curriculum Coordinator for the Ocean Springs School District; Secretary-Treasurer, Devin Walsh, K-1 teacher at Oak Grove Primary School in Lamar County; Past-President, Dr. Brad Johns, Math teacher at McLaurin High School. Members elected for three-year terms to the Board of Directors are: District 2, Jennifer Gaston; District 4, Emily Edgar; District 6, Chris Chism; District 8, Amanda Cummings.

*(From left, front) Jennifer Gaston, Devin Walsh, Cheryl Howard, Lori Brennan and Julie Burton. (From left, back) Emily Edgar, Beckie Nieman, Kevin Garrett, Amanda Cummings, Dr. David Lowery, Dr. Brad Johns, Shannon Eubanks, Tamra Mills, Chris Chism, Dr. LaShundia Carson 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, 2018, and June 30, 2019. 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
MPE is honored to sponsor Mississippi’s new NBCT Network. The network offers NBCTs additional opportunities for growth and leadership. MPE provided financial support this spring on behalf of the Mississippi NBCT Network to several of our state’s World Class Teaching Programs (WCTP) to support their pinning ceremonies for new NBCTs. The Network also provided certificates of recognition to NBCTs being pinned at each ceremony.

Delta State University
World Class Teaching Program

University of Southern Mississippi
World Class Teaching Program

Mississippi State University
World Class Teaching Program

University of Mississippi
World Class Teaching Program

The membership application for the Mississippi NBCT Network is available in the “Quick Links” menu on the left side of the MPE website (www.mpe.org). Keri McRaney, a teacher at Simpson Central School in Simpson County and a member of MPE since 2002, has the honor of being the first member of the Network.
Congratulations to the recipients of MPE’s 2018 Linda Anglin Teacher Preparation Scholarship Award. Each student member was awarded a scholarship in the amount of $500.

Shelley Dornan  
Mississippi University for Women

Presley Stoltzfus  
Millsaps College

Kalik May  
Mississippi Valley State University

Joanna Word  
University of Mississippi

Julianna Garner  
Blue Mountain College

Shannan Summerford  
Mississippi State University

Maia Neal  
Alcorn State University

Kianna Williams  
Tougaloo College

Hannah Holloway  
Belhaven University

Genevieve Thompson  
Mississippi College

Bethny Neblett  
Delta State University

Kristen Steele  
William Carey University

Lillian Looney  
University of Southern Mississippi

Shelley Dornan  
Mississippi University for Women

PRES SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS
Alcorn State University’s MPE Student Chapter completed its third annual service project this past March 23 and 24. MPE student members renovated a classroom at A.W. Watson Elementary in the Claiborne County School District. The teacher in the renovated classroom hosts ASU students during their practicums. The ASU students’ teamwork resulted in the renovation being completed within two days. Painting materials and classroom items were donated by several faculty, family members, and business owners. MPE is proud of our student members giving back to local schools that support them during their teacher preparation careers!
With help from stakeholders like you, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) is getting closer to finalizing a state plan that complies with the Every Student Succeeds Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and a replacement for No Child Left Behind.

I want to reassure you that our goal from the beginning was not to create “one more thing” for schools and districts. Mississippi’s ESSA plan is a refinement of the existing Mississippi State Board of Education’s Strategic Plan. We are not starting over.

We’ve been through so much change in the past few years (standards, assessments, teacher evaluation system, accountability system) that I think there is some sense of comfort and excitement that we know where we are going as a state and that the data show the changes are working for students and communities.

The state’s plan will maintain the commitment to Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards, use the current Mississippi Assessment Program (MAP) for assessments in grades 3-8 and in high school, and use the current accountability model to measure college and career readiness.

While graduation rates improved and the ACT composite increased, we have a long way to go with regard to ACT college-readiness benchmarks and availability of advanced course offerings statewide. Higher standards and the state’s accountability model have elevated student growth in local school districts and we are excited about helping school districts know where the state is headed. The wind is at our backs and we want to continue to expand the vision of lifting student performance for success in college, career, military, and life.

An important and significant part of the state’s plan is a heightened focus on teacher and leader effectiveness. We currently have several components in place to address this issue, including the state’s teacher leader task force, superintendents’ academy, principals’ academy, and new professional growth models for teacher/leader quality. However, we realize the need for a cohesive system of professional development that supports teachers at every phase of their careers.

MDE plans to align professional development opportunities to the Professional Growth System to support teachers from entry into the field to the seasoned veteran. We also plan to increase focus on recruiting and retaining teachers. This is where you come in.

We want to hear from you on both of these areas. What types of professional development would be beneficial for each stage of a teacher’s career? What are your ideas on how we can increase high-quality teacher candidates and how we can retain teachers (especially in high poverty/rural communities)? What teacher leadership opportunities would you like offered?

I encourage you to submit your ideas to mssucceeds@mdek12.org because your ideas can only strengthen our work. You are the frontline in the battle to educate our students and the MDE wants to ensure that we are meeting your needs. We look forward to hearing from you.

As this school year draws to a close, I want to thank you for all of your hard work and I hope you enjoy a well-deserved break this summer.
As the school year comes to a conclusion and graduation ceremonies take place across the state at the secondary and postsecondary levels, I think it is an appropriate time to reflect on the importance of education for students and how quality education lays the foundation to the financial independence of Mississippians and the economic growth in the Magnolia State.

Study after study shows the positive correlation between educational growth and success throughout life. According to a 2016 report from the College Board titled “Education Pays,” the more education a person obtains, the more money they will earn throughout their lifetime. For example, the study shows that someone with a high school diploma will earn almost $10,000 more annually than a high school dropout; someone with an associate’s degree from a community college will earn almost $10,000 more annually than someone with just a high school degree; and someone with a bachelor’s degree from a university will earn $15,000 more annually than someone with just an associate’s degree. Research also shows educated individuals are more involved in both the civic process and the voting process.

The report goes on to show that the more education a person has, the less likely they are to participate in public assistance programs and the less chance they will smoke, which affects health outcomes and insurance costs for many.

Two additional points that I would like to make about the importance of education are that Mississippi is currently experiencing record low unemployment rates and increased graduation rates. Additionally, economic developers are often quick to point out that one of the top issues companies are concerned with when looking to locate a business to an area is “how skilled is the workforce.” Education at all levels can be viewed as the main driver for the state’s economy. All of the points that I provided show the positive impact that education has across all sectors of our state.

From wages that employees earn to the state’s unemployment rate, everything begins and ends with the quality of education a student receives. So, as we prepare to graduate many thousands of students at our high schools, community colleges, and universities, I thank each of you for the very important role that you have played in the life of your students. As educators, you have laid the groundwork for each of their successes, which will also benefit Mississippi as they enter the workforce.

The 2018 legislative session wrapped up in late March. Among the last items addressed was the FY 2019 budget. For the upcoming fiscal year, our community college system was essentially level funded compared to FY 2018. I am appreciative of the financial support the Legislature has given to us for the upcoming year. The investment made in the community colleges will benefit the entire state as our colleges educate and train the future employees and employers of Mississippi.
2016-2017 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. Ninety-one submitted applications for the 2016-2017 school year, with twenty members receiving grants of up to $1,000 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.

Jennifer Parker
Puckett Elementary, 5th Grade Language Arts
One to One (1:1) Initiative

Thank you so much, MPE, for awarding me the grant to purchase 2 Apple iPad Airs as I work towards a one-to-one classroom! In an effort to become a paperless classroom as well as to teach 21st century technology skills to my fifth grade English Language Arts students, I began using Google Classroom, an online classroom management system that allows students to submit papers, projects, and presentations, have online discussions, take assessments, post book reviews, etc. via the Google Classroom portal. This has made collaborative writing and peer editing a lot of fun for the students. They also enjoy the interaction with technology. The iPads have been a very effective tool to engage students actively in the learning process, helping them to take ownership of their learning experiences.

Sherry Putt
Alcorn Alternative Education Center, Grades 1st-12th, All Subjects
Project P³W

Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided PE equipment for our Alternative Center. With PE being a required activity, we were able to provide structured activities where students learned how to follow rules, how to be team players/get along with others, how to care for equipment, how to win and lose gracefully, as well as other social skills. Being involved with these kinds of activities becomes very important to the students at the Alternative Center, since most are attending the school because of some kind of behavioral issues. With the money, we were able to buy basketballs and goals, footballs, volleyballs, badminton and soccer balls with nets, jump ropes, scooter boards, washer sets, and games like “Spikeball” that were new to the students. We now have equipment for individual and team play. Having the equipment has helped the students build social skills, improved overall behavior patterns, and provided ways to be active, thus fulfilling the requirements for the amount of PE minutes required by the state.

Beckie Nieman
North Pike Elementary, K-4th Grade Reading
Books in K’s Hands

Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided new books for circulation in my library. Being the new librarian this year, I had three major goals. My first goal was to provide good quality books to all students. The second goal was to motivate and encourage students to read. The third goal was to allow kindergarteners to self-select and choose books that they could read or have read to them at home. The kindergarteners loved choosing their own books for check out. They learned responsibility in several ways. One, they learned their books must be returned in order to get a new selection. Two, some learned that they needed to use the rules they had been taught to care for their books. Third, they learned that reading is fun and they could read their selections. Teachers in the kindergarten classes have stated that it has helped with the students using their sight words in text as well as their individual reading in their guided reading groups. Through the grant, seventy-eight books were added to the library collection but more than that, a love for choosing a book, reading a book, and sharing a book was given to 175 kindergarten students this year at North Pike Elementary.
Staci Hughes  
*Hattiesburg High School, 10th-12th Grade Business Mgmt.*  
*Tiger Den Student Store*

Thank you Mississippi Professional Educators for funding the classroom grant that provided the launch of the Tiger Den Student-Run Store. The implementation of this hands-on lab for career and technical students had two major goals. The first goal was to provide hands-on opportunity for students to apply business management and finance concepts. The second goal was to equip CTE-Business Management Pathway students with applicable employability and career-readiness skills through real-world experiences. Through the grant, I was able to purchase stationary, novelty, and school-spirit inventory; construct decorative displays; and provide worker uniform shirts.

Keri McRaney  
*Simpson Central, 5th & 6th Grade Gifted Education*  
*Wonder of Being You*

Thanks to the generosity of MPE, my students received a classroom set of the book Wonder. From the reading of this book, we were able to discuss important issues such as kindness, friendship, and bullying. With the purchase of art supplies, students were able to participate in art activities and create posters to hang around the school to encourage kindness and acceptance. Students wrote scripts and became actors, actresses, and video production crews to create an inspirational video that would encourage diversity and kindness through the use of a video camera and video editing software provided through this grant. Thanks MPE!

Crawford Grabowski  
*Northshore Elementary—4th-6th Grade Gifted Education*  
*Venture in Motion*

Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant for an iPad Pro and Pencil for my fourth through sixth grade students. This one device met numerous goals for my classroom. It allowed my students to conduct research easily and create class presentations. The students also were able to learn computer coding by using the iPad’s Bluetooth capabilities to interact with robots. The iPad Pro and Pencil made it easier for me to create activities that require my students to think both critically and creatively.

Lisa Crosby  
*Kosciusko Junior High, 7th Grade Language Arts*  
*ROADTRIP 2K17: 50 States in 50 Days*

Thank you MPE for funding ROADTRIP 2K17. The experiences we have had this year while traveling the United States have made many memories for each child in my classroom. From books, to maps, to flags, my students have learned to value and respect our country through its many cultures, treasures, unique sites, and rich history. Thank you for helping to open our eyes to the beauty that surrounds us in our state of Mississippi and our United States of America!
As I look back over the past 37 years that I have spent as an educator, so much has changed. The power of technology has made the impossible commonplace, but many of the advances we have made have also brought us new challenges. In a few short months, I will retire as Commissioner of Higher Education. Serving as Commissioner has been a rewarding capstone to a rewarding career helping students to learn, grow, achieve, and excel.

One aspect of education that has not changed and will not change is the importance of the leader in the classroom. Classroom leaders on all levels of education—teachers, instructors, professors—have a profound impact on students, teaching them life lessons far beyond the information found on the pages of a textbook. Thank you for your service and dedication. Thank you for your selflessness and sacrifice. Thanks to you, Mississippi continues to move forward. Our children’s future and the future of our state are built on the foundation of education. As Commissioner, I have had a front-row seat in seeing how our university system continues to advance the state.

With almost 28,000 faculty and staff, we serve more than 95,000 students. We conduct research that solves some of Mississippi’s most pressing problems. The system received $420.7 million in external research funding, supporting 2,407 projects, in the last fiscal year.

We have had record enrollment and, more importantly, awarded a record number of degrees. The universities awarded 17,760 degrees in 2017, representing an 8.9 percent increase in the past five years. The number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates has increased by 37.9 percent in that timeframe. In 2017, there were 3,727 STEM graduates and 2,849 healthcare graduates, including nurses.

Our student retention efforts are paying off for students currently enrolled and we are reaching out to those who have made substantial progress toward a degree, but not yet completed all requirements, through the Complete 2 Compete (C2C) initiative. A collaborative effort between the university and community college systems, C2C is a statewide program to help these Mississippians return to college and complete the requirements necessary to earn their degrees. Since launching the C2C website in August, there have been almost 29,000 visits to the website and almost 9,500 applications submitted. There have been 328 associates and bachelor’s degrees awarded through the program. This program has the power to increase exponentially the number of Mississippian with degrees.

We have also reached out to the business community to ensure that we are meeting their workforce needs now and into the future. The Mississippi Business Engagement Network (MBEN) is a partnership effort between the university system, the Mississippi Research Consortium, the Mississippi Economic Council, Mississippi Development Authority, and the Mississippi Economic Development Council that connects business leaders and economic developers with the resources housed within Mississippi’s four research institutions. The partnership includes a website that helps business leaders access these resources quickly and easily.

An aspect of education that has not changed in thirty-seven years is that there are many challenges. This is challenging work that requires innovation and creativity, but there is no more important work. The rewards of doing this important work are many, although there may be days when it feels like the challenges outweigh the rewards.

Education is an investment whose return is realized across a lifetime. Thank you for investing your time and talent in this important work and for joining me on this incredible and rewarding journey.
The Mississippi Professional Educators would like to thank our generous sponsors and vendors who contributed to our 2018 Best Practices Symposium.

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