THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA)
MY FAVORITE TEACHER
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In keeping with the theme of apples, I will pick up where I left off in the last issue of the journal. I discussed the apple and the meaning it has for those in our profession. How many apple knick knacks are displayed in your classroom or office area? Probably about as many as the number of years you have spent in education. On many occasions I have been given an apple on the first day of school or from a student as a token of appreciation. Just as the apple itself is significant, so are its parts.

To me, the seeds of the apple represent the things within each of us that we share with others. We plant seeds daily that, with proper nourishment and care, will grow. I can think of many who have shared with me over the years. Whether it was an innovative strategy, a classroom management technique, or simply an idea for a lesson or a bulletin board, I have drawn inspiration from the expertise of others. I have also had opportunities to plant seeds. It has been my privilege many times during my career to share advice and encouragement with new teachers. Sometimes simply offering a listening ear or a hug has been the seed that was sown within the heart of a colleague who was having a tough day.

The stem is the support that holds the apple on the tree. The support we, as educators, receive from those around us make it possible for us to keep doing what we do day after day. Our family members and friends understand that ours is a higher calling and that although we don’t always receive recognition for the long hours we put in, there is a purpose behind everything we do. We may never see the fruit of our labor but we are faithful, nonetheless, to continue on. Knowing that we have support from an organization like MPE that is made up of educators and administrators who share our struggles makes it easier to hold on when the wind picks up and it would be much easier to lose our grip.

The core is the thing you are truly passionate about. It is the thing you wake up and go to sleep thinking of. It is what keeps you moving forward. I would encourage you over the next few weeks to spend some time thinking about what is at your “core.” Dig deep and try to remember what led you to this honorable profession in the first place. Find others who share your passion. Nurture it by giving it the time and attention it deserves. I read a quote recently that said, “When we focus on leading a passionate, meaningful life, we are creating a spectacular ripple effect of inspiration in the lives around us. When one person follows a dream, tries something new, or takes a daring leap, everyone nearby feels their passionate energy; and before too long, they are making their own daring leaps while simultaneously inspiring others.” My challenge to you is to lead that kind of “passionate, meaningful life.”
Kelly Riley

“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Do not bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”

--- William Faulkner

As I sat down to write this article in the waning days of October, I was struck by how quickly it seems 2013 has passed. Curious as to notable quotes on the passage of time, I conducted a Google search. While I found a quote on the passage of time by William Faulkner, it was the above quote by this Mississippi literary treasure which grabbed my attention, for it captures the essence of MPE’s activities this past year.

MPE is governed by a dedicated Board of Directors which consistently strives to enhance our services for our members. They are developing MPE’s vision and goals to guide our association in the coming years. Our professional office staff serves our membership on a daily basis with efficiency and courtesy. We are offering sixteen regional trainings this year, up from eight last year. We will also be offering ten, rather than five, graduate scholarships this year. We are spotlighting another four of our classroom grants recipients on page 18. We remain financially solid without having raised dues since July 1, 2008. All of this contributes to our ever growing membership. As of November 1, we had 11,713 members. Our ten Area Directors and our 521 Building Reps throughout the state, as well as our members, are doing a phenomenal job recruiting new members and spreading the word about the benefits of belonging to the premier organization for professional educators in Mississippi.

The 2014 Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature convenes at 12:00 Noon on Tuesday, January 7, 2014. I hope you participated in our legislative priorities survey during November. Our staff will be at the capitol monitoring legislative and budget developments throughout the session. I will keep you updated via my weekly emails and our Facebook page. We’ve posted legislative contact information in the “Quick Links” section of our homepage (www.mpe.org) for your reference in sharing your thoughts and comments on proposed legislation in a professional manner with your representative or senator. I would also encourage you to review the “MPE News” section of our website on a regular basis, as we post important news and documents (bill tracking spreadsheets, MDE presentations, etc…) there for our members’ reference.

Have you marked April 12, 2014, on your calendar to attend our 2014 Best Practices Symposium at the Jackson Hilton? I hope you’ll join us for a great day of learning and networking as we celebrate MPE’s 35th anniversary. Dr. Andy Mullins, co-founder the Mississippi Teacher Corps in 1989 and a veteran faculty member of the University of Mississippi’s School of Education, will discuss teacher preparation in Mississippi – where we’ve been, what we’ve learned and where we are going. Our concurrent sessions will feature a session designed especially for our student members, accreditation and accountability updates, the arts in our schools, and financial aid opportunities to increase post-secondary student retention. CEUs and SEMIs will be offered. Online registration will begin in February.

During the excitement of Christmas, please take a few moments to reflect on the invaluable gifts you have shared with your students this past year. You have offered them a stepping stone to the future, an opportunity for them to, as Faulkner said, be better than themselves. Thank you for your service each day and for your continued membership in MPE. Merry Christmas!
Students arrive at freshmen orientation with lots of expectations and begin to get settled into college life. They learn where the student union and the library are located; they learn the rules they must follow if they live in a campus residence hall; and they learn how to navigate the registration process. In actuality, their college experience begins long before the first day of freshmen orientation.

Between birth and age five, children’s brains are like sponges; they truly soak up everything around them. This is a critical time for learning and can have a profound impact on the rest of their educational experiences.

The Condition of Education 2009, published by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, included findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). The study looked at children when they were infants (at about 9 months old, in 2001–02), when they were toddlers (at about 2 years old, in 2003–04), and again when they were preschoolers (at about 4 years old, in 2005–06). The findings included:

- Nine-month-olds in poverty had lower proficiency levels in 3 of 5 cognitive skills, compared with children at or above poverty, although observed differences were less than 4 percentage points. For example, 81 percent of children in poverty were proficient in exploring purposefully, compared with 84 percent of those at or above poverty. For motor skills, no measurable differences were found between 9-month-olds in poverty and those at or above poverty.

- In contrast to patterns found among 9-month-olds by poverty status, significant differences in all cognitive skills were found for 2-year-olds. For example, 29 percent of 2-year-olds in poverty demonstrated proficiency in listening comprehension, compared with 39 percent of those at or above poverty, and 55 percent of those in poverty were proficient in expressive vocabulary, compared with 67 percent at or above poverty. Concerning proficiency in motor skills among 2-year-olds, however, no measurable differences were found by poverty status.

- Differences in proficiency in cognitive skills by poverty status observed when children were 2 years old held when they were 4 years old. Twenty percent of 4-year-olds in poverty were proficient in letter recognition, compared with 37 percent of their peers at or above poverty. Forty-five percent of 4-year-olds in poverty demonstrated proficiency in numbers and shapes, compared with 72 percent of their peers at or above poverty.

These statistics are particularly significant in Mississippi, which has the highest rate of citizens living in poverty of all states. The state’s first state-funded, voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program is a good
start. The Early Learning Collaborative Act, signed into law last spring, provides funding to local communities to establish, expand, support and facilitate the successful implementation of quality early childhood education and development services. The state Legislature appropriated $3 million for the program.

Focusing on early literacy and ensuring that all children can read on grade level before exiting the third grade is also important. Like other programs, it will require time, resources and a focused effort to be able to take it to scale and implement it fully across the state.

In middle and high school, it is important that we continue to find ways to help students identify the skills and interests they have that will translate later into a career. The sooner that students can begin thinking about this, the better they can plan and select the appropriate post-secondary pathway that will help them achieve their goals and dreams.

We know that the jobs of today and tomorrow require a credential of value beyond a high school diploma. For some, this means completing a one-year certificate program. For others, it means getting or completing a career-technical program at a community college. Others require a bachelor’s or professional degree.

We all know that children may change their minds as they grow, learn, and explore their options. However, it is important that they learn about job opportunities available and the requirements needed to get those jobs at an early age so they can build a strong foundation while still in high school.

We must also continue to support students once they have enrolled in college. Our universities are focused on retention efforts and helping all students graduate. Developmental education has a role to play in this. All students have strengths and weaknesses. Some may excel in one area, but have trouble in another area for a variety of reasons. It is important that we give them the assistance necessary to bridge that skills gap so that they can be successful, ultimately attaining the degrees necessary to pursue their career of choice.

Universities also offer a first-year experience to help students build a strong foundation so they can be successful throughout their studies. While the program design varies from university to university, it often includes a common reading experience, additional counseling and mentoring, and a focus on study skills and leadership. These experiences help students make the transition from high school to university.

Universities also have career centers and programs that give students the opportunity to explore career options and help them match their skills, interests and abilities to careers, which helps them to select their coursework and major appropriately. Universities also help students find internships and other opportunities to help them explore their interests in a real-world setting.

We cannot think of education as a series of blocks sitting next to one another, with each one having its own beginning and end. Education is a continuum that begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. It is important that we create an environment where all of Mississippi’s children are given the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.
As the new superintendent of education, I appreciate this opportunity to introduce myself to educators across the state. It is my hope that we can work together to do great things for the children of Mississippi and to provide every opportunity for success both inside and outside the classroom.

As a servant-leader, I value the importance of open and honest communication, team work, and relationship building. I often say, “If you want to know what I’m thinking, just ask me.” That’s because a relationship built on trust improves communication and keeps the focus on solving problems and achieving shared goals.

In my role, I will work to implement the Mississippi Board of Education’s vision, mission, and goals. Reading on grade level, reducing the dropout rate, and improving academic achievement are all goals the Mississippi Department of Education will help you to reach.

I see great potential in Mississippi. I believe the boys and girls of this state are no less smart than the boys and girls in other parts of the country. That’s not to say that I don’t realize the challenges that face children in a state that struggles with poverty and limited resources. I also understand how hard educators work here to help students overcome those obstacles and obtain the best education possible. Now that’s fertile ground where we can grow ideas and make plans for greater achievement.

My experience as a teacher, principal and administrator has provided me a broad view of education. My career in Maryland and Washington, D.C., allowed me the opportunity to work on behalf of students from varied backgrounds, including economically disadvantaged, urban and rural. I have seen what can happen when we focus attention on providing interventions and directing resources to helping all students. When I say all, I mean ALL.

I believe in the power of Pre-Kindergarten programs to help children gain a solid foundation before they enter Kindergarten. I believe that Common Core State Standards will bridge the divide between students who have had access to higher standards and those who have not. It won’t be an overnight success, but I know that if we stay the course, we will see our students’ academic performance rise.

I have seen Mississippi’s student achievement data, and while we have made significant improvements, more work lies ahead of us. I look forward to working with you to discuss ways to narrow the achievement gaps.

I know that funding is an important component of educating children. Like the Board of Education, I support full funding of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program. Schools and districts need adequate resources to educate children and to address the needs of students. As schools and teachers are held to greater accountability, it is critical that you have what you need to meet these higher standards.

I know you face immense changes in education in this state. One of those changes is a new teacher evaluation system. I believe student achievement should be a component of any evaluation system, but it should not be the sole component. The state’s teacher evaluation system will provide a balanced approach to appraising teacher effectiveness.

Finally, I want to encourage you to continue your hard work. It has not gone unnoticed. We must always make decisions that are in the best interest of children because they deserve nothing less.

I’m excited about the future of education in Mississippi and what we will accomplish together for the children of this state.
The Mississippi Community College Board, along with each community college, is committed to efficiency and prudence in spending our taxpayers’ dollars. According to state law, one of the MCCB’s main responsibilities is to count students at each community college, and reimburse the schools based on enrollment, which is done each semester.

In the past, we have contracted with an outside vendor for a software program that, by 2013 technology standards, was very outdated and did not provide the necessary services to complete the enrollment verifications in a timely, efficient way.

When we began to explore other options to upgrade the computer system, we quickly found that a new program and software to meet our needs would cost several hundred thousand dollars. After consulting with the MCCB IT department, we determined that a new and better system could be built in-house, thus saving a large sum of state dollars and making the process much more efficient. The result is the Electronic Audit Reporting System, or eARS, which is currently in place and working very well. The system allows us to verify enrollments much more quickly and accurately, which benefits everyone. The consensus among users is that eARS is a definite upgrade. The MCCB and our community colleges will continue to be good stewards of our taxpayers’ dollars and will strive to operate in an efficient manner.

The 2014 legislative session will convene on Tuesday, January 7, and education will once again be at the forefront of many discussions that take place at the Capitol. We read the happy news that tax collections for FY 2014 continue to exceed the estimates. I am hopeful that during the budget writing process, all areas of education will be a priority for our lawmakers.

We are seeing an increased emphasis both nationally and in Mississippi on productivity and outcomes of our students. During the 2010 legislative session, House Bill No. 1071 created the Education Achievement Council with the goal of increasing the educational attainment and skill levels of the state’s working-age population benchmark to the national average by 2025. It also required each university and community college to publish an annual report card every November 1. Some of the data in the Community College Report Card includes enrollment, degrees awarded, student success, student retention, student progress, workforce training information, and GED statistics. The documents can be found on each community college’s website.

I hope that each of you will have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thanks for all that you do to better Mississippi and our citizens!
I certainly don’t have all the answers, but here are a few humble suggestions for those suffering from ‘seasonedness.’ The first is to stay abreast of new trends/research, remaining positive and willing to change. Sometimes it helps to remember, “This, too, shall pass.” We have seen strategies come and go, only to be replaced by new practices that also fade. Educators are all on a never-ending quest to discover the best methods, so hold on to positive aspects of each ‘course.’

My secret ingredient in this ‘recipe of longevity’ is to make friends with younger educators! They may be ‘unseasoned (do not confuse that with ‘bland’!), but they know technology! My colleague, Gentry Booth, is such a friend. When she shows me why my spreadsheet refuses to cooperate, or which iPad apps are the best, I am willing to swap duty, plan the next field trip, bring Shipley’s donuts for breakfast, proofread her National Board entry, or provide shelter at my home for her hail-battered car! Surround yourself with young minds in every way. Fresh recruits are full of creativity, new resources and ideas, and enthusiasm. They are fun and refreshing to be around, too!

Young teachers (if any of you are still reading this!), have you seen the flip side of these comments? Will you take time to develop relationships with experienced teachers who reflect professionalism, endurance, and an ability to view the big picture with openness, knowledge, and a true passion for the calling? These are seasonings that educators have passed down for centuries, and combine for a recipe of success for you, too. After all, you are the next seasoned educators!
ANDERSON AWARDED LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Mr. Cleveland Anderson, a retired educator and principal mentor, was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award in Education by the 100 Black Men of Madison County, Mississippi. Mr. Anderson served nine years as a teacher and 25 years as an administrator. He has been a member of MPE since 2010. Congratulations, Mr. Cleveland Anderson!

SHEALY NAMED 2013 ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

MPE Member Chad Shealy has been named the 2013 Mississippi Administrator of the Year. Prior to his recent appointment as the Superintendent of the Vicksburg-Warren School District, Mr. Shealy served as the principal at Gary Road Intermediate in the Hinds County School District. Recipients of this award receive a $5,000 salary supplement authorized by the Mississippi Legislature. Mr. Shealy was also named Hinds County Principal of the Year for 2011-2012 and is a former president of the Mississippi Association of Middle Level Education. Chad has been a member of MPE since 2003. Congratulations, Chad Shealy!

TUPELO TEACHERS RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

Twenty teachers and three assistant teachers from the Tupelo School District were given monetary awards from the community to recognize their excellence in the classroom. The Association for Excellence in Education co-sponsored this year’s 15th annual Teacher of Distinction Awards luncheon with the CREATE Foundation and provided $10,000 to expand the number of honorees this year. Winning teachers received $1,000, and assistant teachers received $500.

Fifty-four educators were nominated, and winners were chosen by an external committee of professional educators. Three of this year’s winners are MPE members: Cathy Enis, Stephanie Cayson, and Amber Nichols-Buckley. Congratulations to all of this year’s winners!
ESEA Flexibility: Where we have been, how we got here, and where we are going

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was passed as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and has been the most far-reaching federal education legislation ever passed by Congress. Originally, the law was reauthorized every three years. Since the 1980 reauthorization, however, the law has not received action as regularly, with reauthorization occurring in 1988, 1994, and then 2001. The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA was given the short title “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” or NCLB, as the Act is often referred.

The purpose of NCLB is “to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind”—a goal to which most if not all educators ascribe. However, the accountability mechanisms of NCLB, most notably the expectation that all students would reach proficiency by 2014 and the corresponding sanctions for schools not making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward that expectation, caused NCLB to decline in popularity. Therefore, law makers and federal administrators began using the ESEA reference in lieu of NCLB when discussing the law. In September 2011, after ten years without a reauthorization occurring, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered states relief from the burdensome requirements of NCLB, in the form of ESEA Flexibility waivers.

It is important to note that the ESEA Flexibility waivers do not disregard all provisions of NCLB/ESEA. Key requirements are still in place, including requirements to assess students in reading and math every year in grades three through eight and at least once during grades ten through twelve, to provide instruction by highly qualified teachers, and to notify parents regarding student success and other key academic factors. The provisions that are waived through ESEA Flexibility are primarily centered on the AYP mechanism: a one-size-fits-all approach to school accountability. Just as teachers are expected to differentiate instruction in the classroom, states are challenged to differentiate accountability and support for schools and districts.

In the USDE-required template for requesting these waivers, states described not only these new mechanisms of differentiated accountability but also the complete vision of the state’s system of recognition, accountability, and support, including the implementation of college and career-ready standards and assessments and of statewide educator evaluations that use student growth as a significant factor. Mississippi’s ESEA Flexibility Request, originally submitted in February 2012 and approved in July 2012, included information regarding the state’s progress toward these initiatives. Well before the September 2011 announcement of flexibility options, Mississippi had already opted as a state to adopt the NGA/CCSSO’s Common Core State Standards as Mississippi’s new academic framework.

The purpose of NCLB is “to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind”—a goal
Further, Mississippi joined the Partnership for Assessing Readiness to College and Careers, or PARCC, assessment consortium. Therefore, Mississippi did not have to make any changes to plans in order to apply for the ESEA Flexibility—we were ahead of many states in this area.

As for the educator evaluation requirements, Mississippi was not quite as advanced in the process. Prior to ESEA Flexibility opportunities, the state had begun a teacher appraisal pilot program through a USDE-funded Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Plans were to implement the system statewide, but only after the TIF pilot was complete. Therefore, the timeline for implementation had to be accelerated in order to meet the requirements of ESEA Flexibility. While the MDE and the State Board of Education had begun the process of evaluating colleges and universities providing the required coursework leading to licensure in educational leadership, again plans to implement a statewide administrator evaluation were accelerated to meet ESEA Flexibility assurances. Nevertheless, MDE staff worked diligently from September 2011, through the February 2012 submission and subsequent negotiation of the Request, until final approval came in July 2012.

The work does not end there. Mississippi’s approved ESEA Flexibility Request is being implemented during a time a great change in the state.

Therefore, MDE has submitted three amendments to the Request.

- The first is an amendment to add a waiver to delay the use of education evaluation results until the 2016-17 school year. At that time, Mississippi’s schools will have two years of PARCC assessment data for use in measuring school growth, a significant component of the evaluation model.

- The second amendment will add a waiver to reduce the testing burden for students participating in the Dynamic Learning Maps field test. This waiver, if approved, will allow districts to choose if a student with significant cognitive disability participates in either the DLM field test or the statewide alternate assessment, if accommodations noted on the student’s IEP are unavailable on the field test for English language and mathematics. All eligible students will continue to take the statewide alternate assessment for science, as DLM does not include a science component.

- The third amendment, and possibly most complex, is related to school accountability. The Mississippi Legislature amended legislation to establish a single accountability system to satisfy federal and state accountability requirements. The final business rules to support the new single system comprise the third amendment to Mississippi’s ESEA Flexibility Request.

The revisions do not stop there. Mississippi’s original request, approved for two years, will expire at the end of the 2013-14 school year. Mississippi must apply for renewal for an additional two years by February 2014.

As a part of this renewal, your voice needs to be heard. What additional changes need to be made to improve Mississippi’s implementation of college- and career-ready standards and assessments? How can the MDE best help schools and districts improve instruction and student outcomes? As the statewide implementation of educator evaluation moves forward, what strategies would most incentivize high-quality teachers to work in high-need schools? MDE is posting all relevant information regarding the ESEA Request renewal to our website at http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/federal-programs/the-eesa-flexibility-waiver. Please visit the site and share your input on how we can best improve student outcomes through ESEA Flexibility.

Thank you for all you do each day to impact the lives of the children you touch.
Nancy Collins  
Mississippi State Senator

My Favorite Teacher: Mr. Carl Comer  
School: Tupelo High School  
Subject: 10-11th Grade Chemistry

“Mr. Carl Comer is my choice for my favorite teacher. He was bright, witty and inspired students to learn. He was also tough and expected results. Early in the school year, he asked me to stay after chemistry class and questioned me why I did not do well on a test. I responded that I did not understand that particular lesson. Instead of accepting my response, he challenged me, ‘Why didn’t you raise your hand and tell me you didn’t understand? I would have stopped then and explained it.’ Mr. Comer taught me that day that it is no shame to say that you don’t understand. In the same way to not ask for explanation is to waste a valuable opportunity.

Mr. Comer taught me many life lessons. He saw each student as an individual and made each one feel like he or she was his favorite. It is a privilege to say thank you to him. By the way, I was an average student in Mr. Comer’s Chemistry class but in College Chemistry, I made an A-. (I don’t think he ever believed me!)”

Phillip Gunn  
Speaker of the House

My Favorite Teacher: Mr. Stockman  
School: Clinton High School  
Subject: United States Government

“Mr. Stockman taught United States Government at Clinton High School. He had a profound impact on my education and was a major influence on my choosing a career in law and government. Mr. Stockman was passionate about his subject, and he engaged all students during class time. Every student who had Mr. Stockman for U.S. Government left high school with a deep understanding of the Constitution and Federal government. I am thankful I had the opportunity to take Mr. Stockman’s class, and, fortunately, my daughter, Meredith, was able to learn from him, as well.”
Ronnie Musgrove
Governor of Mississippi, 2000-2004

My Favorite Teacher: Mrs. Katherine Nelson
School: Pope Elementary School
Subject: 1st Grade

“When I was six years old, I contracted pneumonia and spent a lot of my first grade year in the hospital and at home sick. Mrs. Nelson, instead of letting me fall behind my classmates, came to my bedside and helped me learn to read. She would not let pneumonia stop me from learning nor poverty be an excuse to fail. She would not accept anything less than my best. Mrs. Nelson was not interested in who I was, but who I might become. While the lesson of the day was learning to read, the lesson for my lifetime was learning to believe that anything was possible.”

Dr. Carey Wright selected as State Superintendent

The State Board of Education selected Dr. Carey Wright, founder and CEO of Wright Approach Consulting in Maryland, in September as Mississippi’s new State Superintendent of Education. Dr. Wright served as Chief Academic Officer of the District of Columbia Public Schools from 2010 until this past March.

“The Board felt that Dr. Wright possessed all of the qualities we were seeking in the next state superintendent of education. She has a track record of strong leadership, instructional expertise and a commitment to ensuring all students achieve at high levels,” said Hal Gage, Board vice chairman and chair of the search process. “Mississippi has made great strides in improving education over the last few years, and we believe we have selected the right person to build on this achievement.”

Dr. Wright earned her bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Maryland, College Park. She began her career in education as a teacher in Prince George’s County Public Schools in Maryland. She spent the majority of her career in Howard County Public Schools in Maryland, where she served as a teacher and principal for 15 years and the director of Special Education and Student Services.

From 2003 to 2009, Wright served as associate superintendent for the Office of Special Education and Student Services for the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. She joined the District of Columbia Public Schools in 2009, serving as Deputy Chief in the Office of Teaching and Learning before being appointed Chief Academic Officer in 2010. Dr. Wright has also served on the faculty of the Public Education Leadership Project, a joint initiative of Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

“I feel there’s a tremendous amount of untapped potential in the state. My background and experience are what drew me to apply for this position. I am honored to be selected as the next State Superintendent and am committed to doing whatever is necessary to create the finest educational system in our nation. The students of Mississippi deserve nothing less,” Wright said.

MPE welcomes Dr. Wright to Mississippi!
BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced 286 schools as the 2013 cohort of National Blue Ribbon Schools recently. This recognition is based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in improving student academic achievement. These schools were honored at a recognition ceremony in Washington, D.C., on November 18-19.

DE LISLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - PASS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
EAST HANCOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - HANCOCK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
LOVETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CLINTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT
OAK PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - OCEAN SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT

2013 CLASSROOM GRANT WINNERS

MPE would like to congratulate our classroom grant winners! We had 40 eligible applications submitted this year, and sixteen were chosen by our committee to receive grants. The following is a list of our 2013 Classroom Grant recipients:

CHERI ANGLIN
Sumner Hill Junior High
Clinton Public School District

CARRIE CHAPPELLE
Corinth Elementary
Corinth School District

RODERICK DAVIDSON
Ridgeland High
Madison County School District

CHRISTINE DAVIDSON
Northwest Rankin Middle
Rankin County School District

TABITHA DILLARD
Ingomar Attendance Center
Union County School District

VICKI JOHNSON
Glade Elementary
Jones County School District

JACKIE MASSEY
Eastside Elementary
Clinton School District

KERI MCRANEY
Simpson Central
Simpson County School District

CARLY PARKER
Harper McCaughan Elementary
Long Beach School District

REGINA REDDOCH
West Jones Middle
Jones County School District

CANDICE SAVAGE
Lillie Burney Elementary
Hattiesburg School District

COURTNEY SKIPPER
Oakhurst Intermediate
Clarksdale School District

BETH SPILLMAN
Sumrall Elementary
Lamar County School District

MARGARET SPINNATO
Oklen Elementary
McComb School District

TRICIA STOLL
West Elementary
Gulfport School District

JANET TICHNELL
Petal Middle
Petal School District
Give your students a brain boost! Use Move to Learn in your class!

Research shows that students who are more fit have better grades, fewer absences and fewer behavioral incidents. So, Move to Learn is a free online resource created for Mississippi to help teachers get students moving at school through short, easy-to-use fitness videos.

To learn more, visit movetolearnms.org.

“...It’s amazing the difference I can see in my students’ attentiveness before and after we watch the Move to Learn videos.”

MEREDITH BROWN, TEACHER
NORTHSIDE ELEMENTARY

AN INITIATIVE OF THE BOWER FOUNDATION AND THE OFFICE OF HEALTHY SCHOOLS.
Bradley S. Amacker
Petal High School
Configuring a D-STAR Gateway
D-STAR stands for “Digital Smart Technologies for Amateur Radio,” the Japan Amateur Radio League standard for Digital Voice and Digital Data on VHF/UHF/Above. The first manufacturer to offer D-STAR compatible radios is ICOM. As of February 1, 2013, no other amateur radio equipment manufacturer has chosen to include D-STAR technology in their radios. D-STAR compatible radios are available on VHF, UHF, and microwave amateur radio bands.

In addition to the over-the-air protocol, D-STAR also provides specifications for network connectivity, enabling D-STAR radios to be connected to the Internet or other networks and provisions for routing data streams of voice or packet data via amateur radio call signs.

Using the ICOM configuration software, we successfully programmed our ID-880H for both analog operation and for use with the local D-STAR Gateway system. The radio was installed at the Amateur Radio station in the Lab. The D-STAR Gateway was installed at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg, MS. Between October 28 and November 29, 2012, a total of seventeen PHS students took the FCC License exam and passed. We established a link with Olde Town Middle School in Ridgeland, MS using D-STAR. We made contact with them several times.

The students really learned a lot during this process. I was able to teach them about FCC rules and how the rules applied not only to Amateur Radio, but also other radio and wireless services. We were able to learn more about power systems and Ohm’s Law, which aided in the understanding of computer power supplies in our curriculum. We also learned about configuring Linux devices and RF systems. As a result of this project, several of the students have purchased their own radios and plan to pursue Amateur Radio as a hobby.

Melissa Bufkin
North Jones Elementary
Build-a-Backpack

Have you ever built a backpack? Students in one second grade class at North Jones Elementary were able to do just that! On Fridays, one group of students met with the teacher to pack a backpack with books that were aligned to the Common Core Standards and were appropriate for the
Jessica Stephan
Overpark Elementary School
Every Nook Needs a Cranny
Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided interactive reading technology in my classroom. With being new to teaching fifth grade this year, I had two major goals. My first goal was to provide much needed text for the classroom that included both fiction and nonfiction. The second goal was to motivate and encourage students to read and collaborate with peers. Since fifth grade students love to talk, using Nooks coupled with the structure of literature circles were the perfect fit. Through the grant, I was able to purchase 4 Nooks, protective cases, and 13 different book titles thus adding 52 books to the classroom library.

Shea Leake
Northeast Elementary School
Artists In Our World
Research has shown that students attain higher levels of achievement through their engagement with the arts. Most of my kindergarteners are kinesthetic or tactile learners. Art mediums have varied textures and that can be manipulated in many different ways that are perfect for those learners. Through literature and informational texts, I taught my students about a famous artist each month. I showed my students works of art from these artists, but also let them create their own pieces using the preferred mediums of the artist in focus. I reinforced my reading and math skills by using art work during other lessons as well as in my learning centers. Although incorporating art wasn’t my only method to ensure academic success, 88% of my students reached the benchmark goals in reading (letter naming/letter sounds) and 88% and 81% reached the benchmark goals in math (oral counting/number identification) on the AIMSWeb test.

students’ reading level. Within the backpacks, students found paper, scissors, and other art supplies, along with a resource binder of ideas on how to create a project about their book to share with the class. The following Friday, students with a “backpack” shared their book reviews and projects with classmates.
My name is Christine McIntyre Davis, and I am from Ocean Springs, MS. I received the Mississippi Professional Educators Scholarship in my senior year at Mississippi College (2012). After receiving the scholarship, I graduated from MC with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. I married in May of 2012 and moved to Houston, MS where my husband, Eric Davis, served as the youth minister at Houston First United Methodist Church.

I began teaching fourth grade at Houston Upper Elementary School in August of 2012. My first year was challenging, but I felt fully equipped to do my job based on the education I received at MC. I was named “Teacher of the Month” in September 2012 and was chosen to serve on the school’s Leadership Team.

Between Eric’s youth and my students, we found ourselves extremely busy attending plays, recitals, and sporting events. We cared deeply about our students and made every effort to teach them how to contribute positively to the world around them. We loved our time in Houston, but we were called to a knew adventure at the end of the summer.

My husband and I are now continuing our education in Wilmore, KY. Eric is in seminary at Asbury Theological, and I am in the graduate program at Asbury University. I have been blessed with two jobs that are allowing me to work my way through school. I am working as a sales representative for an insurance company each morning and for The Tutoring Club of Lexington each evening. Thanks to my tutoring position, I am exposed daily to curriculum and techniques from the top schools in the area. My students range from kindergarten beginning readers to high school ACT students.

My program of study at Asbury is Teacher as Leader, a two year program focused on building and strengthening teacher leadership ability in the classroom. Eric and I will complete our schooling in the summer of 2015. At that time, we plan to head back to Mississippi to continue our service in the state we love and miss. Thank you, MPE, for your support during my senior year of college. You will always be considered a part of my success.
Comparing public pensions like comparing apples to oranges

When it comes to day-to-day activities, we all like to make comparisons; however, while it may seem a simple exercise, time and teachings have shown that comparisons made without proper context or that lack measurable parallels can create confusion and can lead to inaccurate assumptions.

This is particularly true when it comes to pensions. While what happens in some cities in California may be interesting and informative, it really has little relevance to someone living in small-town Mississippi. And while what happens in Detroit is noteworthy and may be the topic of lots of media coverage, it really does not affect us here. What does matter is how the Public Employees’ Retirement System of Mississippi (PERS) performs as an independent retirement system responsible to the taxpayers of Mississippi and to the members we serve. Just as an apple and an orange are two fruits with vastly different compositions and tastes, public retirement systems provide pensions but vary greatly in structure and operations.

The fallout from the city of Detroit’s bankruptcy filing earlier this year has further fueled the national debate on the cost versus the benefits of public pensions—a debate that continues to trickle down from the national level to the state level. And, while many point to Detroit’s pensions as the reason for their troubles, looking deeper into the details reveals this is not the case. As this translates to Mississippi, it is important to remember that neither PERS nor the State is in a position of fiscal stress. Mississippi, as a sovereign entity, cannot file bankruptcy and has been faithful in funding the contributions necessary to pay the promised benefits.

If we, hypothetically, stopped earning income right now, on an actuarial basis, we would have almost 58 percent (61 percent at market value) of the funds needed to pay benefits for life to our 380,000 members, even those who are decades away from retirement.

PERS’ funded status is calculated annually by our actuaries and monitored by the PERS Board to ensure our continued financial stability. Calculations by others do not always provide the same perspective and may include generalities when used to compare one plan to another. Our focus is on our plan, not on how it compares to another state. Just as comparing the amount you owe on your mortgage to what your neighbor owes does not provide relevant information as to your financial status, neither does comparing one pension plan to another. Our focus at PERS is ensuring our long-term ability to meet our obligations to our members now and in the future, not on how we compare to others. We have always had that focus. We will continue to keep that focus.

The Board of Trustees adopted a funding policy establishing a fixed contribution rate with the primary focus on the long-term stability of the plan, providing a roadmap for the future.

PERS has emerged from the Great Recession with assets in excess of $22 billion as of June 30, above our pre-recession high in 2007 of $21.8 billion, and our rate of return for fiscal year 2013 was 13.4 percent. This year, we received contributions of $1.5 billion and had net investment income of $2.6 billion; while at the same time, we paid $2 billion in benefits (money that helps provide retirement security to thousands and simultaneously stimulates the economy statewide).

We expect public pensions to continue to get a lot of attention, both at the local level and nationally. However, we are confident that we have developed a roadmap to put PERS in the financial position to ensure we will continue to meet our obligations to our members on a perpetual basis, and we refuse to let apples-to-oranges comparisons define us.
Retiree Reflections

Philene Allen, MPE Board of Directors, Retirees

Well, have you gotten over that “what am I doing” feeling we have when the big yellow bus rolls again every fall?

I’ve been retired for years and still think I need to be there. But now that they are well into the school term, my thoughts turn to, “Will the legislature consider changes to PERS and my retirement check?”

As professionals we need and want to continue to be informed—especially concerning something as important to us as receiving what we were promised when we made the decision to retire. Membership in MPE is a very important way to stay in the loop—not only of our retirement but of education in general. Kelly Riley, our Executive Director, sends emails to our retired members whenever something that affects us or our retirement happens.

All members who have the $10 retired membership status are on this email list if the office has your email address. If you are working part-time and have chosen the $60 part-time teacher membership you can receive these emails if you will call or email the office and ask to be put on the list (800-523-0269 or 601-355-5517 or kelly@mpe.org). If you are newly retired, please be sure the office has your correct email address and not the school one.

Our webpage – www.mpe.org – is an excellent source of information. Check it out. Another good website is the one for MRPEA (MS Retired Public Employees’ Association) – www.mrpea.org. That organization has also been very involved in protecting our investment in PERS.

One last reminder---remember we receive a COLA (Cost of Living) check---not a 13th check! I’ve worked hard on changing my vocabulary.

Enjoy your retirement. If I can be of any assistance, don’t hesitate to contact me at 662-588-9011 or phileneallen@bellsouth.net.
Mark your calendars now to attend MPE’s 2014 Best Practices Symposium on Saturday, April 12th, at the Jackson Hilton. Dr. Andrew Mullins, who has served as a Special Assistant and Advisor to two Governors, three State Superintendents of Education, and three Chancellors of the University of Mississippi, will be our keynote speaker. He has served as an associate professor of education, as well as the Co-Director of the Mississippi Teacher Corps. Dr. Mullins authored the book Building Consensus – A History of the Passage of the Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982 and compiled and edited The Measure of Our Days, Writings of William F. Winter.

We will also have break-out sessions with engaging speakers and the latest information on the budget, legislative updates and much more. CEUs will be provided on-site for a minimal fee. SEMIs will also be available. Do not miss this opportunity for quality professional development, updates on MPE activities and great fellowship. Online registration will begin in February.
WHY MPE?

The premier package of benefits for the least amount of money!

**2013 - 2014 DUES**

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* May not include local dues

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Every dollar of your dues stays in Mississippi for your benefit!

MPE does not utilize dues to support political candidates.