### Cover Stories

Our cover reflects various features of the Mississippi State Capitol.

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Dr. Lela Hale

Oftentimes, December is viewed as a season for giving and receiving. I would prefer to think of it as a season of sharing and caring. School groups can be both on the receiving end and on the giving end when they purposefully build relationships with families and communities. Many of you have most likely already developed strong family and community ties. For those of you who have not, it is never too late. In addition to collaborating with parent groups, you may also find partners in local businesses, government agencies, or church groups who are willing to provide tutoring, food services, after school learning center supervision, and oral reading to or with your students.

At Blue Mountain College, some of our educational campus organizations have provided seminars and workshops with parents and students in local schools. By collaborating with the principals, the college-age students and their instructors provided training skills for utilizing reading strategies at home. The students modeled the skills while communicating learning goals clearly to parents, partners, and students. At one school, the college students and school teachers set up literacy and mathematics centers for parents to rotate through and actively participate in reinforcing the skills necessary for learning literacy and math concepts. Each spring, the Blue Mountain Literacy Council and Delta Kappa Pi sponsor Literacy on the Lawn. The instructors write grants to provide books for about 450 area kindergarten children who rotate through literacy and other integrated stations. Our APPLE club, which includes our MPE campus organization, provides book fair monies to disadvantaged students and baby items for a local non-profit group.

Sometimes educators have to reach out to local non-profits to accommodate the needs of students. One such group is the Pinecrest Weekend Snackpacks for Kids and Pantry charity in north Mississippi. Because of continually rising local unemployment, families are in need of help to meet their children’s nutritional needs. Each week during the school year, more than 360 snackpacks with two healthy breakfasts, lunch items, and snacks are provided. Charity volunteers gather each Friday to fill the snackpacks and travel to the schools to deliver them. At the end of the school day, a member of the school staff distributes the snackpacks to the eligible children who are anxious to get the “blue bags.” One evening each month, parents are invited to come to the Pinecrest Family Life Center to “shop” for nutritious meals for the month partly provided by the Midsouth Food Bank. Charity volunteers help the parents select food items to subsidize their home pantries and offer needed support. Volunteers offer medical advice, counseling, and referrals for other needed services.

As we begin the upcoming semester, think about how you may partner with others in your community. As a first-year or veteran teacher, you can be innovative in connecting your classroom with others in your school or your community. Partnering between schools and communities is a reciprocal process. Why not find out who or what organization can assist you and your students in being the best that you can be!
2016 has been another exciting year for MPE! Our 2016-2017 regional trainings are underway and the evaluations are most positive. We are in the process of establishing student chapters on college campuses throughout Mississippi. We have increased the amount of our classroom grants from $500 to $1,000 and we have doubled the number of $1,000 graduate scholarships we will award from ten to twenty. As of November 1, our membership stands at 13,875, with 1,404 new members joining since July 1. We continue to support our members in their classrooms and schools throughout the state.

This issue of the MPE Journal focuses on the upcoming 2017 Legislative Session that will begin January 3. Given the state’s budget situation, as well as the legislative leadership’s desire to redesign the MAEP formula, this session promises to be challenging. Deputy Director Barbie Ferguson and I will be at the capitol throughout the session. I will keep you updated via my weekly emails and we will also post our weekly bill tracking spreadsheets on our website. I hope you will establish a relationship with your local senator and representative and share your thoughts on the various education bills that will be considered.

It is particularly important that you share your thoughts with your elected officials regarding any proposed changes to the education funding formula. As discussed in our feature article on page 12, EdBuild, the New Jersey non-profit hired by the legislative leadership, supports a student-based formula that provides a base student cost for all students and then adds multipliers for needs (ex: SPED, gifted, ELL, students of poverty) of particular students. While EdBuild has reported that it will only be able to provide preliminary recommendations to legislative leaders by the end of this year, given legislators’ expedited actions related to Initiative 42 in 2014, I would urge all educators to monitor developments closely related to any proposed funding formula changes.

If you have not already done so, I hope you will save Saturday, April 8, 2017, on your calendar and will plan on joining us at our 2017 Best Practices Symposium. The day will feature several phenomenal speakers, including Chelonnda Seroyer and William Martinez, both of whom were highly recommended to us by Dr. Harry Wong. A former high school English teacher in Alabama, Chelonnda speaks around the world on the subjects of classroom management and effective teaching. William uses American Sign Language and song to celebrate the teaching profession. Janie Walters, a motivational speaker and former classroom teacher, will cap off our day. Janie has been with us previously and she is always a crowd favorite. We will also share the latest updates from the capitol. Registration for MPE members will open in January. Be sure to join us!

As I write this article on November 1, our country is in continued disarray leading up to the national elections in a week. War continues to plague many parts of our world. If you are like me, you go home not sure that you really accomplished anything some days. But know that you did. You may never see the results of your dedication and your efforts, but you are making a difference in your little corner of our world. As the classic song shares, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Merry Christmas and best wishes for a healthy and peaceful 2017!
Mississippi Professional Educators will award up to twenty scholarships in the amount of $1,000 each to MPE members who wish to pursue graduate level studies at a college or university in Mississippi.

Eligibility requirements for the scholarship include:
• Applicant is a member of MPE
• Applicant will be under contract as a full-time educator in Mississippi during the 2017-2018 school year
• Applicant is accepted and enrolled in graduate coursework at a Mississippi college or university OR intends to enroll in such coursework if awarded a scholarship

For more information, visit www.mpe.org. Applications must be received in the MPE office by February 24, 2017.
Thank you. Those two words mean so much to educators, but are too seldom uttered by students, parents, or the communities that benefit from your hard work. Please let me take this opportunity to thank you for all of your hard work and all you do to transform the lives of your students.

What you do matters. It matters to your students. It matters to their families. And it matters to your communities and our state. We all owe you a debt of gratitude for your service, dedication, and, many times, your patience.

We all know the commitment that it takes to make a great teacher. Unfortunately, too few are choosing to make this commitment or to stay with this commitment for the long haul.

A research brief issued by the Learning Policy Institute in September, “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.,” by Leib Sutcher, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas, found that:

- Teacher demand is growing. If current trends continue, we will see about a 20% increase in annual teacher demand from 2015 levels, reaching 316,000 teachers per year by 2025.
  - Student enrollments are projected to grow by 3 million (to 53 million total) in the next decade, driven by higher birth rates and immigration.
  - Pupil-teacher ratios are projected to shrink from about 16 to 1 to pre-recession levels (about 15.3 to 1), requiring an additional 145,000 teachers by 2025.
  - Teacher attrition remains high, at 8% annually. Two-thirds of teachers who leave depart before retirement age, most because of dissatisfaction with their teaching conditions.

- Teacher supply is shrinking. If current trends continue, we would see as few as 200,000 available teacher hires each year by 2025, resulting in a gap of more than 100,000 teachers annually.
  - There are fewer new entrants, with teacher preparation enrollments having dropped by 35% and teacher preparation graduates having dropped by 23% between 2009 and 2014.
  - Although re-entrants who are former teachers typically comprise one-third to one-half of hires in a given year, the number willing to return is currently not enough to make up the difference.

We are looking at ways to address this and encourage more students to enter our teacher preparation programs. But we cannot do this alone. We need your help.

We need you to encourage your students to follow in your footsteps. They probably know how difficult your job is, but they may not know how fulfilling it can be when a student tells you what a difference you have made in his or her life.

You know the qualities a great teacher must possess. When you see students who are smart, compassionate, and empathetic, when you see students who enjoy helping their fellow students, encourage them to choose teaching as a profession.

Even beyond our students, I encourage you to share stories about the rewards of teaching with others in your communities. The headlines too often focus on the negative: pay that is not as high as we would like it to be, difficult students and situations, lack of support for teachers, among others. While all this exists, there are many positive aspects of teaching. I encourage you to share these aspects with your students, their parents, and others in your sphere of influence. After all, you are one of the greatest advocates for the profession of teaching.

We must continue to work on the negative aspects of teaching and find ways to improve the profession for those who choose it. At the same time, we must also focus on the positive and encourage those with the skills and abilities to become great teachers to select teaching as a career.
It is hard to believe that I have been Executive Director of the Mississippi Community College Board for more than a year. The past twelve months have really flown by, and with the help of partners both within and outside the community college system, a lot of great things have been accomplished.

One of the most exciting initiatives has been the roll-out of the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (MI-BEST) program at each of our fifteen community colleges. This transformative program takes high school dropouts and simultaneously enrolls them in high school equivalency courses and career tech programs, which results in that individual earning a high school equivalency diploma and certificate or credential in half the traditional time. The community colleges have identified fifty-nine career pathways for students to enter that lead to careers that provide family-sustaining wages. This program is funded through a $6 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation our agency received in 2015. Through September 30 of this year, the program had already enrolled more than 400 students that will be able to complete the program and land high-skill, high-wage jobs.

Continental Tire building a facility in Hinds County is another exciting project that our team has been a part of. This project was a culmination of many years of work from various partners including Governor Phil Bryant, Hinds Community College, MCCB, MDA, MDES, and other state leaders. Through these collaborative efforts, the economic development project will create 2,500 jobs in the coming years. Our community colleges, and more specifically Hinds Community College, will be tasked with providing the necessary workforce training for these positions.

Finally, we are continuing to see an increase in both the number of community college graduates and the number of degrees and certificates that are being awarded. In Academic Year 2016, 16,212 graduates earned 18,982 awards. This is an increase of 486 graduates and 865 awards compared to Academic Year 2015. These graduates are able to transfer seamlessly to a university or enter the workforce. Regardless of their destination, these individuals will have a much better life because of the education they received from a community college.

These successes are due to the great work being done at our agency and at our community colleges. They are also the result of various partners coming together to work towards a common goal—bettering our citizens and bettering our state.

In the coming weeks, the 2017 legislative session will convene. Hopefully, all educational entities will receive funding and other resources that will enable us to educate our citizens. As I said earlier, when we all unite behind a common cause and work towards the same goal, we will be able to better all of Mississippi. I thank everyone for the hard work and keep up the good job!
By now, your schools and districts have reviewed your accountability information to determine strengths and weaknesses. I would expect that evaluation process to be an ongoing discussion between teachers and school leaders to find ways to help students reach their educational goals.

What I don’t want to be lost in conversations is all the great progress we’ve made over the last four years. Too often the focus is on what’s wrong instead of what’s right. Let me tell you, we’ve got a lot going right for us and it’s all because of you.

Teachers are some of the hardest working professionals that I know and at a time when Mississippi experienced growing pains from the higher expectations set for students, you did not retreat. You have remained committed to your students and profession and Mississippi’s public education system is the better for it. I commend you.

If you haven’t heard about the significant gains we’ve made, here are a few:

- Mississippi’s 11th grade students earned an overall composite score of 18.3 on the ACT in 2016, an increase from 17.6 in 2015. Students made gains in each of the four categories of English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science.
- Mississippi saw growth in all three major categories of Advanced Placement (AP) participation and performance, with a 23.1 percent increase in participation, a 22.8 percent increase in the number of exams taken, and an 11.1 percent increase in students achieving qualifying AP scores.
- Mississippi’s graduation rate reached an all-time high of 80.8 percent, up from 78.4 percent the previous year. At this rate of growth, we could surpass the national rate of 82 percent by next year.
- The state’s dropout rate fell to 11.8 percent from 12.8 percent the previous year, continuing the downward trend from 16.7 percent in 2011-12.
- For the second year in a row, our Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results showed that the majority of kindergarteners made significant gains during the academic year, with the average statewide score exceeding the previous school year’s score.
- Statewide, 63 percent of kindergarteners met or exceeded the end-of-the-year target score that categorizes them as transitional readers. Students scoring at this level are beginning to read unfamiliar words and easy reader material, but are not yet independent readers. Last year, 54 percent of kindergarteners achieved the transitional reader score.

You have experienced a great deal of change in the last few years and you have met and conquered any challenge. As you continue to work to help students reach unprecedented levels of success, the Mississippi Department of Education will continue to provide the professional development you need to feel confident in your work in the classroom.

These results are only the beginning. You are leading the charge in breaking down barriers to academic improvement. So on those days when you may feel tired or frustrated, please remember that you are making a significant difference in the lives of students each day. For that, I applaud you and I look forward to even greater accomplishments.
Not for a year, but for a lifetime

I recently had the opportunity to reconnect with a very special teacher from my childhood. As we reminisced, my mind was flooded with wonderful memories of recess adventures, field trips, class parties, and funny mishaps. She was a great teacher. She was funny and had a knack for bringing life to her lessons. Our classroom was always filled with excitement and things that reflected our natural curiosity. We were always welcome to bring the bugs in from outside or try our hand at any one of the many experiments found in our science book. We were encouraged to question everything.

It is often said that in order to teach you must first reach. She was the epitome of that philosophy. She would tell us stories about herself and her family. She would share her interests with us and invite us to do the same. She continuously connected with each of us as people, not just as her students. She was genuine and we knew she cared. I remember feeling so valuable and loved.

When I made the choice to become a teacher, I decided I would follow in her footsteps and create lasting memories with my students. I take the time to get to know each of my students and tell them all about myself. I zone in on their interests and what is most important in their lives. I refer to them as my kids and assure them that they always will be.

Our students spend the majority of their time with us. Whether or not it is quality time depends on the relationships we build. Along the way, look for little hints that suggest lasting connections have been made. For example, one of my second graders told me, “Wow. You really do get me.” Another example is when I was recently stopped in a local hardware store by a former student who said, “I wish more of my teachers could’ve been just like you.” We never know when these special moments will come, but when they do, they remind us we are right where we belong.

So, as we enter the final half of another school year, let’s take the time to connect with our students. They are not aware of the countless hours spent on lesson plans, newsletters, grading papers, crunching test data, filling out deposit slips, etc. In the classroom, it’s all about the relationship between us and them. They will remember us first and our lessons last. Let’s work on creating the lasting memories we will cherish for the rest of our lives. After all, they’re not just our kids for a year, they are our kids for a lifetime.

Spence Andrews, MPE Board of Directors

OUR STUDENTS SPEND THE MAJORITY OF THEIR TIME WITH US. WHETHER OR NOT IT IS QUALITY TIME DEPENDS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS WE BUILD. ALONG THE WAY, LOOK FOR LITTLE HINTS THAT SUGGEST LASTING CONNECTIONS HAVE BEEN MADE.
MPE Members Share Their Thoughts via Annual Membership Survey

MPE always appreciates hearing from our members! 1,139 members participated in our annual online survey this fall and shared their thoughts on five questions related to their satisfaction with their MPE membership, as well as 11 questions regarding education policy issues. Survey results include:

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- 38% joined MPE for our professional liability insurance, while 2% joined for our values, 1% for our cost, and 1% for our educational news. 58% joined for all of these reasons.
- 55% are “very satisfied” and 39% are “satisfied” with their MPE benefits.
- 40% believe our liability protection is the most important benefit, while 8% cite our education updates and 7% cite our legal assistance and professional advice.
- 28% want training on classroom management, 23% want SPED training, 9% want mathematics training, and another 8% want training in the area of science.
- 53% do not support a $5 increase in annual dues earmarked to bring nationally recognized keynote speakers to our annual symposium, while 47% support the $5 increase.

POLICY QUESTIONS

- 40% cited PERS/retirement as the legislative policy issue of most importance to them, with another 31% citing MAEP funding.
- 70% do not support the diversion of state funds to nonpublic schools, home schools, or virtual schools via vouchers, tuition tax credits, scholarships, individualized education funds (IEFs), or other means. 6% support the diversion of state funds via these means.
- 54% believe Mississippi should expand access to high-quality early childhood learning programs across the state, while another 29% believe we should continue investing in quality pre-K programs as funds allow.
- 58% believe consolidation should be student-based and on a case-by-case basis, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. 7% believe districts with small student enrollments should be consolidated with nearby larger districts. 3% believe failing districts should be consolidated with nearby successful districts.
- 72% believe that the legislature should not mandate how local districts may allocate their local funds, while 6% believe the legislature has the right to mandate how districts allocate local funds.
- 38% believe charter schools should only be operated by non-profits, while 10% believe private companies should be allowed to operate for-profit charters. 52% need more information before making a decision.
- 91% support the implementation of a Code of Ethics for local school board members.
- 90 participants worked in either a community college or university, with 63% of these members citing faculty salaries as the issue of most importance to them and 37% citing the remediation of freshmen students.
- 69% believe that Mississippi should not change the style of its retirement plan and should continue to provide a defined benefit plan with the state assuming the financial risk.
- 51% do not support tax cuts if they result in a reduction of state services, while 10% do support tax cuts if they result in a reduction of services.
- 59% cited education funding as the most pressing policy issue for the legislature. 29% cited the overall budget, 8% cited PERS, 3% cited infrastructure (i.e., roads and bridges), and 1% cited the state flag.

Congratulations to Sarah Shows of Tupelo Middle School and Vicky Williams of Ridgeland High School for winning the free memberships we gave to survey participants.
The 2017 Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature convenes at 12:00 Noon on Tuesday, January 3, 2017. As in years past, MPE will provide regular updates via our weekly emails and social media to keep our members informed as to the status of legislation being considered. Our members may then contact their respective legislators with their thoughts and support or concerns on particular issues or pieces of legislation.

**HOT TOPICS**

Many of the decisions in the upcoming session will be influenced by Mississippi’s budget challenges as described below. Specifically related to education, the funding formula and consolidation are also likely to be hot topics in 2017.

**Mississippi’s Budget Challenge:** Not only will legislators develop and adopt the FY 2018 (July 2017 – June 2018) budget during the upcoming session, but they will also most likely have to take action regarding revenue shortfalls for the current FY 2017 (July 2016 – June 2017) budget. Late last spring, legislative leaders attributed having $56 million less revenue than was budgeted for this current fiscal year to a staff member’s error. An additional $80 million in anticipated revenue was taken off of the table when Attorney General Jim Hood concluded that legislators could not transfer special funds into the general fund as was planned. The combination of these two situations meant the state started this Fiscal Year 2017 on July 1 in the hole by approximately $130 million.

July and August revenue collections did not meet projections, so in early September, Governor Bryant announced budget cuts averaging about 1.6% to most state agencies. A few budgets, including the MAEP, Student Financial Aid, and Veterans Affairs, were spared from this first round of cuts. The Republican leadership cited growth in state government spending and a sluggish economy as causes for revenue shortfalls, while Democratic leaders cited the more than forty tax cuts passed in recent years as the cause.

In October, state economists reported that state revenues for the first quarter of this fiscal year (July – September) were down 2.27% below projections, resulting in the worst first-quarter performance since Fiscal Year 2010, during the Great Recession. Following this announcement, Governor Bryant stated he will work with the legislative leadership in January to make any adjustments needed to be made in the second half of the budget year. Of course, cuts in the second half of a fiscal year present more challenges for agencies to absorb, as there is only half of the year left in which to absorb such cuts. FY 2017 cuts and reductions must also be incorporated into the FY 2018 budget.

**Redesign of the K-12 Education Funding Formula:** Lt. Governor Tate Reeves and Speaker Philip Gunn announced in October that they had hired EdBuild, a New Jersey nonprofit, to examine the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) funding formula in an effort to “modernize the outdated school funding formula and direct more tax dollars into the classroom.” Having been in business for two years, EdBuild has conducted similar work in Connecticut and Georgia.

Mississippi’s current funding formula was adopted in 1997 after two years of study and development by consultants and legislators. In her first public meeting with legislators on October 27, Rebecca Sibilia, CEO of EdBuild, touted a student-based funding formula that provides a base student cost for each student and then adds multipliers (i.e., additional funding) for students based on need (i.e., SPED, gifted, ELL, students of poverty). With regards to equity, EdBuild believes vertical equity to be more supportive of individual students, as it presumes that students from lower-income communities require more funding due to increased needs. Sibilia believes it is the state’s responsibility to equalize funding between high and low wealth districts.

Sibilia reported in October that EdBuild plans to have preliminary recommendations to legislators by the end
of this calendar year, which means legislators could consider changes during the upcoming legislative session. Although Sibilia emphasized that these will be preliminary recommendations, educators should anticipate some action by legislators on the funding formula during the 2017 session.

Consolidation: Legislative leaders continue to cite the need for school district consolidation in Mississippi, with some setting a goal of 100 school districts. The number of districts in Mississippi has already decreased from 152 in 2010 to 144 today. With consolidation legislation first introduced and passed in 2012, fourteen districts throughout the state have been consolidated into six since that time. Legislation was passed during the 2016 Legislative Session that provides for another six districts to be consolidated into three in 2018 and 2019. In addition, a study commission is developing its plans for the consolidation of three districts into one consolidated district, while another commission develops its recommendations for the abolishment of another district with its students and resources distributed to two other districts.

Legislators have cited various reasons for these consolidations: low student enrollment; poor student performance/lack of student growth; redistribution of funds from administrative salaries to the classroom; and/or, greater access to academic offerings for students. The Legislature has sought local community input with each of the above and has modified legislative provisions in some cases based on such input.

MPE has developed a white paper on consolidation that reviews the research on the subject and the history of consolidation in our state. The paper also presents six issues for legislators to consider in any future consolidations. We have shared this paper with the legislative leadership. It is available via the “Quick Links” section of our website (www.mpe.org).

Hold Elected Officials Accountable
It is imperative that legislators hear from their constituents, as they are elected to represent their constituents. Legislators need to know that their local constituents are watching their votes at the capitol and will hold them accountable for those votes. Exercise your right to contact your representative and senator, as well as other statewide elected officials, to share your thoughts or concerns on bills being considered at the capitol. Be sure to use your personal computer and email for communications, as school resources (i.e., computer, email) should not be used for such communications.

In addition to contacting your respective representative and senator, you should also feel free to contact the legislative leadership, as well as the respective chairman of the committee considering a bill. More than 200 bills are traditionally referred to education committees, while higher education committees generally consider 20-30 bills each year. The appropriations committees will make critical funding decisions that will impact state services, including education, in their development of the budget. Key contacts and committee chairmen include the following:

- **Lt. Governor**
  Tate Reeves
  ltgov@senate.ms.gov
  601-359-3200

- **Speaker of the House**
  Philip Gunn
  info@philipgunn.com
  601-359-3300

- **Senate Education Committee**
  Senator Gray Tollison
  gtollison@senate.ms.gov
  601-359-2395

- **House Education Committee**
  Rep. John Moore
  jmoore@house.ms.gov
  601-359-3330

- **Senate Universities & Colleges Committee**
  Senator Josh Harkins
  jharkins@senate.ms.gov
  601-359-3246

- **House Universities & Colleges Committee**
  Rep. Nolan Mettetal
  nmettetal@house.ms.gov
  601-359-3331

- **Senate Appropriations Committee**
  Senator Buck Clarke
  bclarke@senate.ms.gov
  601-359-3250

- **House Appropriations Committee**
  Rep. John Read
  jread@house.ms.gov
  601-359-3340

You may find contact information for all legislators via the legislature’s homepage (www.legislature.ms.gov). During the session, the public may leave phone messages for legislators with the capitol switchboard at 601-359-3770. You may also find contact information for legislators via the “Quick Links” menu on the left side of MPE’s homepage (www.mpe.org).

Conclusion
Our state’s current budget situation will pose a formidable challenge during the upcoming session. Many issues, including education, will be considered and discussed. MPE’s Executive Director and Deputy Director will be present at the capitol throughout the session. Be sure to look for the latest updates from the capitol via our weekly email updates, as well as Facebook and Twitter (@KRileyMPE).
We would like to recognize the following 21 members who have already earned a free membership for their recruitment efforts during the first quarter of this year:

- Lance Bolen, Pascagoula School District
- Crystaline Bounds, Newton Municipal School District
- Brooke Bowden, Petal School District
- Ashley Fletcher, Lauderdale County School District
- LaDonna Griggs, Pontotoc County School District
- Diane Harel, Pontotoc County School District
- Becky Hayes, Lowndes County School District
- Cheryl Howard, Quitman County School District
- Brad Johns, Rankin County School District
- Rachel Kiepe, Neshoba County School District
- Bill Kirby, Petal School District
- Charles McClatchy, Marshall County School District
- Tamra Mills, Newton County School District
- Beckie Nieman, North Pike School District
- Anjanette Powers, Delta State University
- Stacy Reeves, University of Southern Mississippi
- Debbie Schlicht, Nettleton School District
- Debbie Stephens, Nettleton School District
- Timeka Thomas, Tate County School District
- John Vance, Rankin County School District
- Gloria White, Sunflower County School District

**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 five
** member must have previously been made inactive for a period of three months or more
MPE Regional Training

MPE is pleased to offer the following regional training sessions. Participants will receive .6 CEU credits for each full-day course. Sessions will be provided at NO COST for MPE members. The cost for non-members is $25. Each session’s content is timely for educators during the 2016-2017 school year.

Infusing Technology into Daily Instructional Strategies: This session will be a hands-on session that is limited to the first 20 participants. Participants will be able to utilize such resources as Snag-It, Adobe Spark, Screencastify, Camtasia, PollEverywhere, FlipQuiz, Today’s Meet, and various Google apps. Instructors will focus on using technology to gain immediate feedback for measuring student growth.

Infusing Technology Secondary Training
• Jan. 23 Jones Junior College, Ellisville (Registration closed-full)

Art Education Across the Curriculum: This training develops the key elements of arts integration: the “big idea,” real world content, standards-based instruction, and authentic assessment. Participants will explore the what, how, and when; they will then examine lesson exemplars and apply their learning in order to plan arts integration for an upcoming unit of study.

• Feb. 1 Hinds Community College, Muse Center, Pearl

Using Data to Drive Instruction: This session will be a hands-on collaborative training geared toward ensuring participants learn how to use valid data to drive instruction in their classrooms. Participants will complete assessment activities, utilizing both formative and summative data, and develop a plan to incorporate data-driven instruction in their classrooms.

• Feb. 10 Hilton Garden Inn, Starkville (Registration closed-full)

Hot Topics in Autism and Dyslexia: This session will be divided between Autism Spectrum Disorder topics in the morning and Dyslexia topics in the afternoon. Each presenter will focus on current trends, issues, and best practices in the fields of autism spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia, and related disabilities. Participants will be exposed to a course of study that will help them better understand each disability, as well as dispel the most common myths. The training format will include lecture, videos, and group discussion.

• Jan. 11 Greenville Higher Ed Center, Greenville
• Jan. 31 Hinds Community College, Muse Center, Pearl (Registration closed-full)

Gifted Education Best Practices: Using hands-on activities, this session will incorporate best practices in all content areas of the curriculum. Participants will understand the needs, characteristics, and various talents of students who have a gifted ruling. Participants will complete projects to use in their classrooms, as well as discover additional classroom funding sources.

• Jan. 19 Life Church, Laurel
• Feb. 7 The Natchez Grand Hotel, Natchez

To register, go to www.mpe.org, click on the “Professional Development” tab, and then click on the hyperlink for the respective training you wish to attend. If you need additional assistance, contact Barbie Ferguson at barbie@mpe.org.
The MPE Board of Directors recently elected Beckie Nieman to represent our members in District 7. A member of MPE since 2003, Beckie is the librarian at North Pike Elementary, where she serves as an MPE Building Rep. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Corpus Christi State University before earning her Master of Science in Reading Curriculum and Instruction from Texas A&M University. Beckie earned her National Board Certification in Generalist/Early Childhood in 2005. MPE appreciates your service to our association, Beckie.

Dr. Barbara Howard was one of eighteen faculty members recently inducted into the Academy for Research and Scholarly Engagement at Jackson State University. The Academy for Research & Scholarly Engagement brings together a multi-disciplinary cohort of faculty (Academy Scholars) at various stages in their careers with experienced principal investigators (Academy Coaches). Academy Scholars participate in a sustained program of in-person workshops, self-paced learning via an online course, mentoring, and engagement with program officers at federal agencies and foundations. An Assistant Professor in the School of Lifelong Learning, College of Education and Human Development, Dr. Howard joined MPE earlier this year.

Connie Gusmus of Guntown Middle School in Lee County was chosen this fall to fly on the Cycle 4 SOFIA plane in November. SOFIA is the largest airborne observatory in the world, capable of making observations that are impossible for even the largest and highest ground-based telescopes. During its planned twenty-year lifetime, SOFIA also will inspire the development of new scientific instrumentation and foster the education of young scientists and engineers. Connie is one of only twenty-two educators chosen from more than 180 applicants from around the world. She has been a member of MPE since 2001.

Archie King died on September 6. Mr. King had a long and satisfying career as an elementary teacher and principal with Jackson Public Schools. He provided invaluable support and services to Linda Anglin, MPE’s founder, as she established our association in 1979. After retirement from the Jackson Public Schools, Mr. King enjoyed a second career as a licensed professional counselor and human relations consultant. MPE appreciates Archie King’s commitment to public education, as well as his contributions to our association.

The following MPE members were recently elected as 2016-2017 officers of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators (MASA):

Dr. Ray Morgigno, superintendent of Pearl Public Schools, will serve as MASA’s 2016-2017 President. Dr. Morgigno has been a member of MPE since 1997.

Dr. Matt Dillon, superintendent of the Petal School District, will serve as MASA’s 2016-2017 President-elect. Dr. Dillon joined MPE in 2009.

Tony Cook, superintendent of the Houston School District, will serve as MASA’s 2016-2017 Secretary. Mr. Cook has been an MPE member since 2014.

In addition, during MASA’s fall leadership conference, the association honored Dr. Ben Burnett, Dean of William Carey University’s School of Education, with its 2016 Golden Lamp Award for his dedicated leadership and contributions to public education. Dr. Burnett has been a member of MPE since 2014.
More than sixty educators were nominated in September as Teachers of Distinction for their contributions to the Tupelo Public Schools. The event is co-sponsored by the CREATE Foundation and the Association for Excellence in Education. MPE would like to recognize the following twelve MPE members who were nominated, including six who were honored to receive this distinction:

MPE MEMBERS HONORED AS TEACHERS OF DISTINCTION

*Kelly Blanton
Tupelo High School

Patricia Bradway
Tupelo High School

*James Mark Garrett
Tupelo Middle School

Anthony Golding
Tupelo Middle School

Suzanne McGrath
Tupelo High School

*Leona Ramey
Rankin Elementary School

Anna Beth Williams
Lawhon Elementary School

*Crystal Wilson
Milam Elementary School

Brittany Womack
Joyner Elementary School

*Denotes Teacher of Distinction

Not pictured:

James Jones, The Fillmore Center

*Charles Parker, Tupelo High School

*Dedra Wray, Pierce Street Elementary School
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 2015-2016 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.

Tamra Mills  
Newton County Elementary– 4th Grade Reading  
*Living Wax Museum*

The Wax Museum project funded through the MPE Classroom Grant was an amazing experience for my students and me. My goal was for my students to become engaged in history in an authentic and creative way. My students read about and researched a historical figure. They then wrote essays, prepared storyboards, and prepared two-minute speeches. History truly came to life on the night of March 31, 2016. Each student stood in front of a storyboard, in costume, and presented a “living wax museum” to over 167 parents and community members. The results of this project far exceeded my expectations. My students and I received so much positive feedback. This was definitely a project worth repeating every year.

Keri McRaney  
Simpson Central School–2nd Grade Gifted Education  
*Super Sleuths*

Thanks to the generosity of MPE, gifted students at Simpson Central School gained an opportunity to become practitioners in the field of forensic science that challenged them to use thinking skills and problem-solving skills by engaging in a unit called Super Sleuths. Students were able to explore how forensic science is used in criminal investigations, apply the principles of forensic science to a hypothetical crime, and use the scientific process to solve a fictional crime. This unit was designed to engage and motivate students with scientific principles while developing critical thinking skills and exploring career opportunities.

Martha Smith  
Gaston Point Elementary, 2nd–5th Grade Reading  
*B.O.O.S.T.*

Thank you MPE for funding the new curriculum in our B.O.O.S.T. (Building on Our Skills Together) class. Through your generosity, we were able to help our students develop new skills to reach their maximum potential in reading comprehension. This is a lasting gift because reading is the foundation for achievement during the school years and throughout life. MPE rocks!
Sharon Schaefer
South Pontotoc High School Grades 9-12 Chemistry
Chemistry as Art: Making Raku Pottery

Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided a kiln for our art and chemistry classes at South Pontotoc High School. Our goals for this project were to use innovative means to engage our high school students in a manner that would motivate their study of the arts and sciences. By introducing technology and familiar materials, we were able to realize the goal of connecting art and chemistry educational content with students’ lives. Creativity and experimentation were applied when students made their own unique pieces of art and assessed their project in writing. Without your generosity, this collaborative project would not have been possible. We look forward to reaping the benefits for years to come!

Jennifer Parker
Puckett Elementary- 5th Grade English/Language Arts
What are You Reading Now?

Thanks to MPE’s Classroom Grant, I was able to purchase 56 new books for our 5th grade ELA classroom library. Students utilize our classroom library daily and they get so excited to see new books. I can hardly unbox the books fast enough, let alone get them cataloged in our online circulation system. Students are provided in-class time to read daily and their English homework is to read a book of choice for at least 30 minutes. Students write literature letters to me weekly, which are letters describing what they are currently reading and their thoughts about the story, a character, or perhaps a personal connection; I then respond weekly by writing them a letter in return, probing for deeper meaning and understanding. Students also write a book review each nine weeks. Mostly students use books from our classroom library for their book of choice, which is why it is so important to have books readily available for student perusal. Literature letters and book reviews are now posted to our class blog at: https://pespawprints.wordpress.com/. Students are able to see what their classmates are reading and to make comments to their responses. We are also posting the books we are currently reading on our “What are you reading now?” Padlet page. Thank you, MPE, for helping to grow our classroom library, but more importantly, thank you for helping to grow our student readers!

Lenette Stinson
Petal Elementary - 4th Grade English Language Arts
Text Talkers

Thank you MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided 100 books for our classroom library. One of the goals of the project was to have diverse genres in the classroom with two copies of each book. By using the paired books library, students read independently at home and discussed their books in class during our Text Talkers’ allotted time. By providing purposeful reading, students were motivated to read and share what they had read. Without prompting, students even contacted each other after school to read and discuss excerpts from their books. Interest levels increased in students and they began researching additional information on the topics. Through the funds of this grant, my students spent more time reading independently, which provided essential skill reinforcement and a lifelong love of reading.
THE AFFORDABILITY OF PERS

Our business is about the future. Every investment transacted, contribution received, benefit paid, law changed, regulation amended, decision acted on, and thought given is about meeting the promises we have made to the hundreds of thousands of people depending on us for their retirement. We take this very seriously. And we know you do, too.

We also know that you might feel unsure about the future when you read headlines, articles, blog posts, and reports that come from sources other than the Public Employees’ Retirement System of Mississippi (PERS) that assert that Mississippi is in the midst of a pension crisis.

Sensational as those headlines may be, there is truth to the fact that we have unfunded liabilities. We report these unfunded liabilities clearly every year in our annual reports, in our newsletters, in e-mail updates, and online. Our current funded status has hovered around sixty percent since 2011 and it may continue to do so for years to come as we work through one of the country’s most difficult financial times since the 1930s. The Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 was the biggest recession PERS has ever seen since it was established in 1952, but it was not the first. We also weathered the dot-com bust (1999-2001). That said, I cannot agree that we are in a pension crisis.

We pay in excess of $150 million in benefits every month to more than 100,000 people. And we know that there are thousands of others who are expecting to receive their benefits when they retire. We work to ensure their monthly benefits will be paid, too. And they will be paid.

Our funded status means we presently have approximately sixty percent of the funds needed to pay not only all current benefits, but all projected and future benefits. Having an unfunded liability is analogous to having a mortgage and making mortgage payments faithfully every month while sixty percent of all the funds needed to pay the entire mortgage is in savings. Paying off the mortgage might be a desired or even preferred course of action, but having the mortgage is not a crisis. However, to ensure the long-term solvency of PERS and to ensure that we can pay benefits for years to come, the Board of Trustees, under the guidance of our consulting actuaries, manages the plan and monitors the funded status, the effects of which will be seen over time, albeit incrementally and very gradually. And as the hands of time slowly turn, taxpayers, media, and leadership begin to tap their toes nervously and allow their waning patience for substantial progress to turn their minds to the question of affordability for public retirement systems like PERS.

But there are two questions of affordability: Can Mississippi afford its public employees’ retirement system? And can Mississippi afford not to have a public employees’ retirement system? The respective answers are yes and no. The question of the affordability of PERS right now is best answered by looking at how much the state pays in contributions annually compared to how much it pays toward the rest of its expenses annually. Over the past twenty-five years—including the years of the Great Recession and the dot-com bust—the employer contributions paid to PERS by the state have remained less than five percent of the state’s overall expenses. Of the state’s $4.2 billion in expenses in 1990, 4.35 percent was paid to PERS and of the state’s $16.3 billion in expenses in 2015, 4.65 percent was paid to PERS. The dollar amount that goes to PERS has
Why would I want to continue to be a member of MPE if I am retiring? That is a question I am asked frequently and it started me thinking. Why did I continue? And why have I remained a member sixteen years after retiring?

I am pretty sure my first reason was that I viewed myself as a retired educator—but still a professional—and so wanted to continue to be a part of my professional organization. I took advantage of our part-time employee membership when I was first retired but worked part-time teaching GED and then again when I spent three years as a part-time high school librarian because I wanted to be covered by our liability insurance. Then when I no longer needed the insurance, our lifetime retired membership was perfect for me. It will pay for itself in seven years and I don’t have to remember to send in $10 a year.

As retired employees, I know we are all interested in anything happening with PERS or the legislature concerning this. Kelly Riley, our director, stays informed and sends out emails with any new information. She also attends meetings representing us. Numbers count when she goes before these committees or talks to legislators and our being a part of MPE’s retired membership helps.

As the board representative for retired members, I am available and welcome calls or emails from you, questions, or just to share what a good time we are having. phileneallen@bellsouth.net 662-588-9011

—Philene Allen
MPE Board of Directors, Retirees
Are you receiving weekly emails from our Executive Director?

Keep up-to-date with the latest MPE news, education and legislative updates, scholarships, regional trainings and classroom grant opportunities.

email kelly@mpe.org to add your email to our distribution list.
Chelonnda Seroyer and William Martinez will celebrate the teaching profession during MPE's 2017 Best Practices Symposium.

- A former high school English teacher in Alabama, Chelonnda is an educational consultant and international presenter who speaks around the world on the subjects of classroom management and effective teaching. She often shares the stage with Dr. Harry Wong and Dr. Rosemary Wong.

- Through American Sign Language paired with singing, William shares the story of a boy who grew up in a deaf household with little exposure to tv, radio, or movies. Because of his incredible 8th grade music teacher and the love and support of his parents, he came out of his silent world and discovered his voice through music. He celebrates the incredible impact educators and parents have on each child's life…regardless of their struggles. (www.william-martinez.com, www.signingthesong.com)

“Chelonnda is an awesome speaker, highly entertaining and funny, yet very practical with her methods. William will validate the teaching profession.” – Dr. Harry Wong

We will also share the latest information from MDE, as well as the capitol. Author and motivational speaker Janie Walters will close out our day. "Life changing," "fabulous," and "wonderful" are just a few of the comments she has received from those attending symposium in the past. CEUs will be available.

2017

Save the Date!

Saturday, April 8, 2017
The Hillton
Jackson, MS

Registration for MPE members will open January 16.
WHY MPE?

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

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<tr>
<th>2016 - 2017 DUES</th>
<th>MPE</th>
<th>OTHER ORGANIZATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>$484*-$516*</td>
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<tr>
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*May not include local dues  †Liability insurance not included

Your MPE membership includes...

- Professional liability protection of $2,000,000 with $3,000,000 maximum
- Legal assistance related to employment or professional matters per MPE policy
- $10,000 accidental death & dismemberment coverage
- $2,500 assault related property damage
- Identity theft coverage
- Graduate & undergraduate scholarships awarded annually
- NBCT recertification scholarships awarded annually
- Classroom grant opportunities awarded annually
- Free regional trainings offering CEUs to members at no cost
- Unlimited professional advice available 24/7
- Brightview Credit Union membership
- MPE Journal published three times per year
- Staff monitors legislation at the state capitol, with weekly updates provided to membership
- Every dollar of your dues stays in Mississippi for your benefit! MPE does not support political candidates.