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2021
2020
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Devin Walsh

Distance Learning, Zoom, Teletherapy and Quaranteaching...These terms, though foreign to me a month ago, have become a regular part of my vocabulary in the past few weeks. Over twenty years as a kindergarten and first grade teacher, I’ve taught a lot of children, but I can confidently say that I’m the one learning valuable lessons in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. You may be overwhelmed with the information surrounding the Coronavirus. You might even cringe when you hear someone utter a word that begins with the letter “c”. But I want to share a few positive “c” words that I’ve found to be more viral than this pandemic!

First, I have seen numerous educators display care and compassion for their students. Teachers, administrators, and support personnel all over the state immediately sprang into action when it became evident that children would be out of school indefinitely—not only to ensure they had books and supplies, but to ensure they had access to food. Almost as quickly as the news of school closures spread, I heard stories of men and women whose compassion drove them to set up sites where meals would be distributed to children who needed them.

Secondly, I’ve heard people commend and celebrate educators. Many parents who were suddenly tasked with facilitating distance learning quickly realized how hardworking, creative, passionate, and worthy of respect educators really are! They took to social media “demanding immediate teacher pay raises” and “pleading for homeschool help.” As I read the numerous posts, my heart swelled with pride for all the educators of Mississippi who deserve this praise but rarely receive it.

Lastly, I have seen educators collaborating and coming together. Zoom meetings are happening nearly every hour. Conversations are taking place—across grade levels, departments, and subject areas, that put everyone on a level playing field. Sure, this is uncharted territory and none of us knows what we’re doing. But there is comfort in knowing we can figure it out TOGETHER! It’s ironic to think that what pushed us out of our school buildings forced us to unite. Teachers from the Mississippi Gulf Coast to the Mississippi Delta are teaming up to create virtual lessons that will translate from the classroom to the living room. It’s no longer MY school or YOUR district. At least for now, rivalries and ratings aren’t important. We’re all TEACHERS doing what needs to be done so STUDENTS can learn no matter where they are!

In closing, let me say that I couldn’t be more excited about what’s happening across our state right now. Educators like you are stepping out of their comfort zones, being more innovative than ever, and committing themselves to the idea that learning isn’t confined to the walls of a classroom. Let me challenge you to make this “new normal” your “new normal” and when we “go back,” I hope we won’t “go back” to where we were before. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your MPE President and for going on this incredible journey with me!
As my term as MPE President reaches its end, I have been reflecting over the last year and I am proud of what MPE has accomplished! My term began with legislative turmoil and continued through a hotly contested election during which teachers became a collective voice in the state. My goal was for MPE to be a strong advocate for education and for teachers to become strong advocates for themselves. While the results were maybe not what we wanted, I am here to tell you that OUR TEACHER VOICES WERE HEARD! Education has become more of a priority during this legislative session. The teacher pay raise bill, while not huge, was the FIRST thing our senate passed. We have our legislators’ attention! Let’s continue to keep their attention and continue to stand up for our profession.

My vision was to make a difference and I believe that we are! I have met with many teachers across the state and our number one goal still remains to make a difference for our students. They are the WHY most of us became teachers. We are continuing to show that our students can be successful. We are supporting each other and encouraging more to become teachers. This year I taught a cohort of prospective teachers through alternate route. These are college graduates who figured out that they would rather be teachers! I was so inspired to see the passion ignite in them as they learned more about what it takes to be an effective teacher and by the end of the course, all of them were ready to MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Continue to share your passion with your students. Continue to fight FOR public education in the state. Continue to make certain that our profession is recognized, respected, and rewarded. Continue to do your research and educate yourself and others on all things affecting education. Remember that we are the largest voice in the state. We need to continue to have those difficult conversations with our legislators where we express our opinions respectfully. We need to continue to stick together and continue to build our profession. We need to continue to show those in our classrooms that this profession is the best profession, in spite of the issues that we face. As I pass the torch to Devin this year, I feel confident that teachers will still be a strong voice for education. I know that MPE will continue to be #BlueForMSTeachers and I know that we will all continue to make a difference! We do it every day.

My term began with the election turmoil but it has ended in the middle of an international pandemic. Many of us are now teaching remotely, experiencing things none of us have ever experienced. We are missing our students and our coworkers. I never realized how much I depended on the interactions with students and teachers until I couldn’t interact with them (except virtually). This is so hard! However, this too shall pass, and we will be better and stronger because of it. Many parents are now very appreciative of our profession and we should all be proud. Our kiddos need us just as much as we need them!

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your President. It has been an absolute honor to represent almost 14,000 of the most impressive and the most deserving people. I will forever be grateful for the opportunities that I have had and I pray that I was able to serve you well.
I’m staring at a blank computer screen the morning after Governor Tate Reeves announced that school buildings will be closed for the remainder of the year and I am trying to find the words for this article. I finally realize that there is really only one simple message and that is, “Thank you!” Thank you for continuing to love and miss your students during the closures. Thank you for your first thought being of how your students are going to eat. Thank you for not making excuses or slacking off, but rather, jumping into distance learning, with many of you learning the ins and outs of it as you were implementing it. None of us expected this. College classes didn’t prepare us for this. But that didn’t stop you and other educators throughout our state. Educators met the challenges head on and provided for their students.

While the spring issue of our MPE Journal traditionally spotlights our annual symposium, that obviously wasn’t possible this year. Dr. Joe Olmi of USM facilitated our “Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of Today’s Learners” regional trainings this year and received fantastic reviews. You may face a huge challenge meeting the emotional needs of your students this fall following this pandemic. We hope Dr. Olmi’s article on pages 12 and 13 and his depth of knowledge regarding emotional supports will prove beneficial to you and your students.

Although our annual membership meeting was held via teleconference on April 4, those in attendance appreciated the encouraging words offered by MPE’s 2020-2021 President Devin Walsh of Oak Grove Primary, as well as those of Lori Brennan, our 2020-2021 Past President. New directors elected to the MPE Board of Directors are Chanda Ferguson, Dr. Tracey Gregory, Dana Knight, and Ike Sanford. Visit page 10 to learn more about them. I would like to thank Shannon Eubanks, Kevin Garrett, Cheryl Howard, and Dr. David Lowery for their commitment and service to MPE, as they rotated off our board.

As Thomas Paine shared, “The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” I’ve tried to remind myself to look for the good throughout the closures and shelter-in-place orders and I have found several good things, including:

- Online communities have been an invaluable means of support for educators. District lines disappeared — especially with the suspension of state tests — and educators from throughout the state shared resources, ideas, and words of encouragement via social media.
- Distance learning has highlighted the number of students and educators who do not have adequate Internet access at home, which has initiated a discussion among state and industry leaders to address this issue.
- Educators utilized a variety of means to reinforce their relationships with students in these uncertain times. Social media has been flooded with pictures of educators throughout our state holding up signs containing messages of “I love you,” “I miss you,” or “You can do this” for their students. Some educators paraded down their students’ roads or streets honking their horns and waving to their students to let their students know their teachers were thinking about them.
- The State Board of Education’s expeditious suspension of numerous regulations and policies — especially those related to accountability, assessments, and licensure — opens the door for future review of several facets of the accountability model.
- Districts found innovative ways to host graduation for their seniors. From virtual celebrations to drive-through graduations and other events, districts went the extra mile to honor these students, who missed numerous milestones this spring.

It all comes down to relationships. That is why it is so painful for the school year to end this way. As Rita Pierson shared in her infamous TEDTalk, “Every kid needs a champion,” educators are champions for their students every day, but Mississippi students have had an army of champions fighting for them during COVID-19. You have walked the walk as you have continued to teach them, to lead them, and to love them. Although it has been a different type of school year, I hope you have found the gifts it offered. Get some rest. Take care of yourselves and let’s start planning for a wonderful 2020-2021 school year with any challenges it may hold. And once again…Thank you!
Good for us, Better for you!

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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*
- 5+ 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, 2020, and June 30, 2021.

Free memberships will be credited towards the next year’s membership.

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

Mississippi Professional Educators’ Classroom Grant Program

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

Up to 40 $1,000 grants will be awarded to teachers or instructors to enhance their instructional program.

The deadline to apply is September 4, 2020. For more information, please visit our website at www.mpe.org

www.mpe.org  PAGE 7
April 20, 2020

Dear Educators,

Several weeks ago, at the invitation of a friend in K-12, I joined a web-based video conference with administrators across the state. Before sharing about the state’s response to COVID-19, we listened as attendees attempted to find resolution on so many issues: how to safely prepare and serve food to make sure children do not go hungry, finalize grades for the year, push back and reorganize graduations, and mitigate the risk of an extraordinary summer slide.

Since this first meeting, I have spent time in countless virtual classrooms watching as our teachers guide our students through lessons in Spanish, math, writing, AP U.S. history, and others. The circumstances are less than ideal, but our teachers press on with instruction and assignments, oftentimes while trying to care for their own children who are at home.

Like other crises we have faced in our state’s history, COVID-19 has given Mississippians the chance to show our resiliency. Educators are one of the best examples of our grit and determination. There are very few positives forthcoming from this pandemic, but one is a well-deserved increase in the respect parents and students have for you.

This terrible virus, however, has also revealed our weaknesses, including significant gaps in access to the Internet and technology. We know this has complicated distance learning for you and your students. As policymakers, we are in the process of identifying these areas in need of improvement and we are brainstorming legislative solutions.

In the weeks, months, and even years ahead, the fallout we will likely see from COVID-19 will be dramatic. Every day our restaurants, retail stores, and other businesses are closed is a day of lost revenue and productivity. The toll experts have predicted it will take on the budget is nothing short of devastating. We will all be forced to make even more sacrifices, limit spending, and be creative in how we deliver government services.

We must remember, however, the challenges we will face are ultimately temporary. Our resolve to create an even better Mississippi for our children and grandchildren is permanent. Ending the teacher shortage, raising teacher pay, increasing access to quality pre-K programs, and expanding career and technical opportunities are still the major items on my education agenda. I hope I can count on your support and input as we make these goals a reality.

Every night at 6 p.m. during the order to shelter-in-place, we asked citizens to ring a bell or otherwise make a joyful noise in gratitude for our healthcare workers on the front lines. We recognize not all heroes wear scrubs. Because of your heroism and hard work, Mississippi has a brighter future on the horizon.

The road to our future is paved by educators. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Delbert Hosemann
Lieutenant Governor
State of Mississippi
2020 GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Bethany Abdul-Hadi
Mississippi State University

Laurin Bailey
William Carey University

Missy Bufkin
William Carey University

Jessica Dalton
William Carey University

Amy Davis
William Carey University

Dani Edmonson
Belhaven University

Jorie Hemphill
Mississippi State University

Chris Higginbottom
Delta State University

Dana Kosztur
Mississippi State University

Alicia Milstead
University of Southern Mississippi

Penni Morgan
Delta State University

Ashley Rouse
University of Southern Mississippi

Tricia Stoll
William Carey University

Jessica Stroo
William Carey University

Sara Stylges
William Carey University

Katie Vander Molen
University of Southern Mississippi

Julie Walley
William Carey University

Todd Willis
University of Mississippi

Kristen Zemek
University of Mississippi

Anna Zinke
University of Southern Mississippi
Dana Knight is a Spanish instructor at Jones County Junior College (JCJC). Prior to joining JCJC, she taught Spanish at Northeast Jones High School. Dana earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with a foreign language concentration in Spanish from the University of Southern Mississippi before earning her Master of Education with a concentration in Gifted Education from William Carey University. A member of the Mississippi Foreign Language Association, she received JCJC’s 2018-2019 Barbara and Gary Sauls Humanities Award.

Dr. Tracey Gregory is an Assistant Professor of Graduate Education and Doctoral Studies at Belhaven University where she teaches educational leadership courses and serves as a dissertation chair and/or dissertation committee member for doctoral candidates. She taught in the Jackson Public School District before serving as an administrator in Sunflower County, Tupelo, Yazoo City, and Hinds County. Tracey earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Jackson State University and her Master of Education in Elementary Education from Belhaven. She earned both her Educational Specialist and her Doctor of Education from Delta State University. A member of MPE since 2010, Tracey serves on MDE’s Educator Effectiveness Advisory Council, as well as the Millsaps College Principals’ Summer Institute Advisory Board.

Ike Sanford retired from the Covington County School District in 2012 after serving as District Superintendent for twelve years. He then served as a Leadership and Coaching Specialist with the Mississippi National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) before retiring last summer. Ike began his career as a teacher and coach in the Jackson Public School District and worked in Hattiesburg before serving as a building level administrator in Covington County. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Education from the University of Mississippi, his Master and his Specialist in History from Mississippi College, and his Master and Specialist Certifications in Educational Administration from William Carey University. A lifetime retiree member of MPE, he joined our association in 2000.

Chanda Ferguson is a kindergarten teacher at South Pontotoc Elementary in the Pontotoc County School District. A member of the State Superintendent’s Mississippi Teacher Council, she also serves as her school’s Title I Parental Involvement Coordinator. Chanda earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and her Master of Education in Elementary Education from Delta State University. She received her National Board Certification in Early/Middle Childhood Literacy this past December. A member of MPE since 2016, she serves as an MPE Building Rep.
MPE MEMBERS EARN ADVANCED DEGREES

Kendra Hall received her Ed.S. in Education Leadership, Principalship from Arkansas State University in December. A member of MPE since 2017, she is an ICT 1 and Keystones teacher at Coleman Middle School in the Greenville Public School District.

Deana Baulch, a kindergarten teacher at Shannon Primary School in the Lee County Schools, recently earned her Specialist Degree from Liberty University in Curriculum & Instruction with an emphasis in Special Education. A member of MPE since 2017, she is pursuing her doctorate at Liberty University.

Darnita Walker, a SPED teacher in the Calhoun County School District, graduated in December with her Master of Early Childhood Services from Arkansas State University. She has been a member of MPE since 2013.

AUSTIN AND DARNELL SELECTED AS FINALISTS FOR MISSISSIPPI’S 2020 TEACHER OF THE YEAR

MPE is proud to have two members among the four congressional district finalists for Mississippi’s 2020 Teacher of the Year. Mississippi’s Teacher of the Year and Administrator of the Year will be announced in June.

Benjamin Austin, 9th-grade Advanced Placement Geography, 10th-grade World History, and 10th-grade Accelerated World History teacher at Petal High School, is the Congressional District 4 Finalist. Having grown up in Peru as the son of missionaries, his fluency in Spanish allows him to relate to and support his students who don’t speak English. Austin has been a member of MPE since 2016.

Mina Conlee Darnell, an 11th-grade Honors Mathematics teacher at Clinton High School, is the Congressional District 2 Finalist. Darnell has taught at Clinton High School since 1989 and has served as the CHS math department chair since 2012. She holds an associate degree from Hinds Community College and a bachelor’s degree in mathematics from Mississippi College. Darnell joined MPE this past January.

Have you retired?

If you have retired, please contact the MPE office and let us know. Retired membership in MPE is just $10 per year, or a one-time charge of $70 for a Lifetime Retiree membership. Retired membership includes the MPE Journal 3x per year, discounted rates on long-term care insurance, auto/home insurance, and dental and vision insurance. Additionally, many of our retired members join us for our annual symposium. As a retired member, you will continue to receive priority registration at a discounted rate.
Many writings have begun with the opening phrase used by Charles Dickens in his novel, A Tale of Two Cities, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness…” This phrase may be used to characterize the current situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Society is plagued with unanswered questions and a perceived lack of control. It would be easy to get lost in the uncertainty of the moment and forget the purpose of what we do... to educate our kids and to provide them with a safe and secure setting marked by predictability. But educators do not have that luxury.

I was raised in the Mississippi Delta in a small town and am the proud product of our public school system. I and all my siblings are or were educators, including my sister who began her career in the Alabama public schools, a deceased brother who retired from the Mississippi public school system, and another brother who is a middle school special education teacher in south Louisiana. Having gotten my start as a middle school teacher overseas and in the Delta before working as a school psychologist in south Louisiana public schools for several years, I am now a licensed school psychologist who trains graduate students in the School Psychology Program at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Some who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 are fully quarantined while others are practicing self-imposed isolation due to exposure. Others of us are practicing social distancing and government- and municipality-imposed stay-at-home orders. Such actions are important and necessary.

In a recent article published in Lancet (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, and Rubin, 2020), the authors speak to the psychological effects of quarantine and social isolation on adults. While the subjects of the studies included in their review were predominantly adults, the information is especially relevant to educators, our students, and their families. Many of us are experiencing the rather typical responses to the current crisis, including boredom, loss of social contacts through traditional means, having to relocate our offices and learning to work from home, and dealing with being in close proximity to family members for this extended period of time.

While some experiences in response to the situation are rather typical, the authors noted that nega-
tive psychological effects might be experienced by others. In the case of those served by educators and those we serve, in addition to ourselves, these effects may be realized in the short term or years from now. Some of those negative psychological effects include depression, anxiety, hopelessness, extreme fear of contracting the illness or infecting others, confusion, anger, and traumatic stress. The psychological distress may manifest itself in feelings of social isolation to an extreme degree, disruption in our social networks, detachment from others, mood lability, insomnia, or physical exhaustion, to name a few. There are many others that can be mentioned. One has to keep in mind that these effects can and will be experienced not only by those we serve, but also by ourselves.

The additional negative effects caused by the economic distress cannot be overstated. Families and individuals are faced with the loss of a job, the loss of income, and the uncertainty of being able to meet financial responsibilities caused by such. While there are economic stimulus packages that have been approved and have been promised, when those will be available and to what degree is unknown. As well, such support, while appreciated, will not be sufficient to keep families afloat should this situation be long term.

As much as the effects can vary for adults, so too can the effects for our children/students. To some, the current situation may be viewed as a crisis, while to others it is merely an inconvenience that causes them more social disruption than anything else. There are factors that dictate the degree of effect in children such as family support, family resources such as finances, personal resiliency, mental health/well-being, and whether the child has a disability or disorder. But for sure, the perception of how the situation is handled by the adults in their life is paramount.

Educators are being challenged and stressed by having to not only care for their students using nontraditional modes of instruction while learning these new strategies on the fly, but by also caring for their own families and being responsible in part for the education of their own children. This is challenging, to say the least. Self-care must take precedence, otherwise educators will not be responsible to those they serve and their own children will suffer. Self-care might involve taking breaks from the news, maintaining a schedule, getting enough sleep, eating smart, engaging in healthy self-care activities such as reading, journaling, and exercise, and connecting with family/friends using technology. One must make himself/herself a priority.

On a related note, one may not be diagnosed with the virus, but may know someone who has been. Many of us may know of a family in our school system who has a parent/guardian, relative, or child who has been diagnosed. In our support of those individuals, one must be careful to not treat them differently by avoiding them or by failing to provide them with the appropriate educational supports. While we are all wary of contracting the virus, we have to resist treating them with fear, thereby further stigmatizing them.

It is tempting to view the current situation as a glass half full. Rather than that approach, one should adopt a growth mindset that fosters feelings of hope and anticipation. One should embrace this challenge that pushes us to learn, grow, persist, and thrive. In the long run, we will all be better for it. Seek knowledge from the many resources that are available to us and be informed.

Reference
Teachers and Administrators of the Year

The Mississippi Department of Education is scheduled to announce Mississippi’s 2020 Teacher and Administrator of the Year in June. The Mississippi Administrator of the Year program honors an administrator who demonstrates superior ability to inspire teachers, employs exemplary leadership practices, and participates as an active member of the community. Likewise, the Mississippi Teacher of the Year program recognizes exemplary teachers in the state.

Congratulations to each of the following MPE members honored as their respective district’s 2020 Teacher or Administrator of the Year.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Marianne Holley, Booneville
Zidia Bridges, Brookhaven
Carra Turner, Chickasaw County
Shelby Collins, Cleveland
Mina Darnell, Clinton *
Danielle Whittington, Columbia
Davis Riddle, Forrest County
Pamela Lawson, Greenville
Victoria Clemons, Hinds County
Rebecca Victor, Holmes County
Katie Miller, Houston
Michele Landrum, Jones County
Tessa Horn, Kosciusko
Karin Harvison, Lamar County
Lucy Watts, Lincoln County

Scott Heard, Louisville
Candace Pugh, Marion County
Tijuana Mack, Mississippi Achievement SD
Linda Isbell, Monroe County
Angelica Barnett, Nettleton
Megan Hodge, Pearl River County
Stephanie McInnis, Perry County
Benjamin Austin, Petal *
Sarah Todd, Pontotoc City
Jennifer Wright, Pontotoc County
Jennifer Goree, Scott County
Kayla Jenkins, Simpson County
Richard Phillips, Tishomingo County
Laura Sheffield, Tupelo
Clancy Cleveland, Union

* Congressional District Finalist for Mississippi 2020 Teacher of the Year

ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

Teresa Martin, Biloxi
Cornishee Sims, Clarksdale
Marcus Holbert, Forest
Lori Massey, George County
Jessica Taylor, Hancock County
Lisa Ishee, Jones County
Paula Gibbs, Lafayette County

Angela McHenry, Lauderdale County
Cedric Collins, Lawrence County
Vicki Boone, Marion County
Jennifer Pope, Ocean Springs
Laurin Bailey, Pearl
Austin Alexander, Pearl River County
The USM Student Chapter of MPE co-sponsored the Foundations of Reading Test Preparation Workshop on the USM campus on Friday, November 1, 2019. Approximately sixty students attended. Students were provided with study strategies, testing strategies, and sample test questions for each of the four sub-areas covered on the Foundations of Reading exam.

Students were led by peers who had passed the exam. In addition to leading the workshop, the peer student-leaders were able to share strategies and to provide valuable insights into their success. MPE and USM’s School of Education hold these workshops once per semester.

The USM Student Chapter of MPE was founded in the fall of 2018. Dr. Stacy Reeves, MPE’s 2006-2007 President, serves as faculty advisor for the chapter.

Attention Mississippi NBCTs: We want you to join the Mississippi NBCT Network!

Now that you have achieved National Board Certification, it is time to discover your own path to leadership. The Mississippi NBCT Network, sponsored by the Mississippi Professional Educators, promotes professional learning opportunities for and advocacy by Mississippi NBCTs. Network activities include:

- Advocacy on behalf of National Board Certification and NBCTs
- Support of Mississippi’s World Class Teaching Programs
- Professional Development Opportunities
- Monthly Email Updates
- Annual Network Conference

The Mississippi NBCT Network is open to all NBCTs in Mississippi. Annual membership dues are $20.

Visit www.mpe.org/nbct to learn more.
2020 LINDA ANGLIN TEACHER PREPARATION SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Congratulations to the recipients of MPE’s 2020 Linda Anglin Teacher Preparation Scholarship Award. Each student member was awarded a scholarship in the amount of $500.

Kelli Boles  
Delta State University

Amanda Brown  
Alcorn State University

Toni Crisler  
University of Southern Mississippi

Quinlan Gray  
Mississippi State University

Montana Hussey  
University of Mississippi

Christina Lee  
Mississippi University for Women

Nellie Massey  
Millsaps College

Schatorious Redmon  
William Carey University

Molly Sorto  
Mississippi College

Hope Tourney  
Belhaven University
What to Do in Times of Uncertainty

Hello fellow educators!

Unfortunately, I did not get to see you at the MPE Best Practices Symposium this year. As a matter of fact, many things have now been shut down by this virus. Spring sports, plays, competitions, and even graduations hang in the balance as of right now. As the principal of a high school, I am absolutely sick for our seniors and our parents. I am also hurting for our teachers, coaches, and sponsors. If you are an educator, I am sure you feel the same way. This entire situation was unexpected and the ramifications from the spread of the virus have grown exponentially for all Mississippians.

The question ultimately becomes as follows: What should we, as educators, do during these uncertain times?

First, I truly believe we all should be THANKFUL for our jobs and the efforts made to be sure those jobs are stable moving forward. I have seen, firsthand, the effect this shelter-in-place has had on members of our own community. While I do not always agree with our leaders, I do believe this is a time to let them know we appreciate their consideration and their efforts to maintain stability for all of us.

I believe we should be PROUD of the work our educators are currently doing across this state. The response and “togetherness” I have seen between teachers and administrators across our state is unprecedented. Schools were given an impossible set of circumstances and they have responded in a way that should make everyone in this state very proud.

I believe we should all now look for opportunities to HELP our communities. What we do right now is so much more important than test scores or averages. Many of our students have lost their “safe place.” Students have lost their daily nourishment and many students have also become the caretakers in their own homes. As educators, we need to make sure we are there to help in any way possible. From handing out meals to counseling students and families, everything we do during trying times matters more than you can possibly imagine. As we move forward this year, I implore you to look for ways to become more involved.

Last, I believe we need to be PATIENT and FOCUSED as we move into the next school year. There is no doubt our state budget will be hit heavily by this outbreak and we need to be understanding with the legislature and our own districts. We need to show all of these leaders the same grace we were shown when schools were given some freedoms from testing and accountability. This does not mean we lose our focus on our students. Each one of our kids gets ONE opportunity at a quality education and it is our responsibility to make sure each child receives it.

In closing, I want to tell you all how proud I am of all of you. We have come a long way as educators and I am excited to see what the future brings. In recent years, you have all come together to make positive changes in this state. Your voices were heard during the election cycle and educator opinions are still being solicited today. Thank you for your work. Thank you for your voice. Thank you, most of all, for what you do for students each and every day. Let me leave you with one of my favorite quotes from Gilda Radner. I think her words perfectly sum things up for me.

“I wanted a perfect ending. Now I’ve learned, the hard way, that some poems don’t rhyme, and some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next. Delicious Ambiguity.”

Have a wonderful summer!
No one could have imagined that the 2019-2020 school year would have been interrupted in such a historic manner. While many of our state’s school districts were enjoying spring break in early March, the inevitable appearance of a dangerous virus began its encroachment into the United States.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 forced us all, from the state level down to the school level, to rethink how we delivered education to thousands of students. Within days of Gov. Tate Reeves’s Declaration of a State of Emergency on March 14, school districts jumped into action to develop ways to continue education of their students. As it became evident that school closures would be extended, we all worked to ensure that teaching and learning would persist without the added concerns over state testing and accountability.

The Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) quickly acted to suspend all federal and state assessments for the 2019-20 school year and to submit a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for exemption of those federal requirements, which was approved. While we were acting on the state level, schools were working as well.

I am in awe of your efforts to help your students. Thank you. I’m sure it wasn’t easy. You have families to nurture, children of your own to educate, loved ones fighting this terrible disease, perhaps personally or professionally, and basic needs at your homes. Yet, you did what you always do as professional educators.

You took care of your students. Some of you collaborated to develop printed packets of work for students with limited technology. Some of you refreshed your skills with online platforms to develop lessons and quizzes online. Others arranged virtual classes with students and encouraged them during this time. Again, thank you.

Please know that you are an inspiration to me, employees of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the SBE. You have our unwavering support as we navigate this unprecedented time in our country. We are working with state and national leaders to find ways to make distance learning better for you and your students.

Dr. Jason Dean, SBE chair, subscribes to the belief that “disruption brings innovation.” We are certainly seeing that from school districts in our state, but we are also working on innovation at the state level. We are working with education partners to develop short-term and long-range plans to assist schools with devices, broadband access, and high-quality instructional materials. We will share these opportunities with educators as soon as they become available.

We hope that a vaccine can be developed soon to eradicate the devastating effects of this disease, but we must prepare in case it resurges as some experts predict. We want to make distance learning a smooth transition and an equitable process for all students.

In the coming weeks, we will be reaching out to many of you to provide feedback to the MDE on considerations for distance learning as part of our long-range planning. We believe that by working together we can find solutions to the challenges ahead.

I know as educators we often put others’ well-being above our own, but I hope you take some time for self-care. Find moments in your day to reflect, to rest, and to recharge. We don’t know how long this virus will disrupt our daily lives, but we do know that we are stronger together.
As I write this article, it is early April and COVID-19 has impacted our way of life and tornado season is fast approaching. This has been a challenging year, to put it mildly. My comments for the spring edition of the MPE Journal are often focused on the conclusion of the spring semester and school year, graduation ceremonies, and preparations for the summer semester that are occurring on community college campuses.

While all of these things are taking place, the challenge has been how to address them during a pandemic. When faced with a challenge, people often freeze, run, or face the challenge with the courage to accept change. The challenges that circumstances like COVID-19 throw our way can be seen as providing an opportunity to explore a new way to deliver education, conduct training, host events, and even support the connections between students, faculty, and staff. COVID-19 has forever impacted people and families.

I have always said that fear and greed are the primary motivating factors for many. The fear of sickness or fear of being without resources, like toilet paper, creates in some the greed- and fear-fueled hoarding. The fear of facing an unprecedented pandemic and the educational, economic, and social upset it brings pose many challenges. Fear is REAL and a driving force for people, agencies, and government. Regardless of circumstances, the Mississippi community colleges were always one step ahead. As responsive institutions, they have traditionally had the ability to “turn on a dime” to respond to change, meet challenges, and find quality solutions that benefit Mississippians.

From an educational perspective, COVID-19 forced us to evaluate the way we operate and the manner in which we deliver educational opportunities. The college leadership teams quickly came up with delivery models that worked for students. This included moving face-to-face classes to online modules, evaluating and responsiveness to address athletics, career and technical education, and workforce training. Community colleges are, and traditionally have been, prepared for the curveballs in life’s game. Prepared or not, the community college system has the support and cohesive strength to step up to the plate. Right now, community colleges are making plans for the delivery of education and training in the summer without knowing what the pandemic-related circumstances will be in mid-May. Additionally, in light of the economic challenges currently facing individuals, companies, and yes, education institutions, the community colleges stand ready with a plan to help people obtain a quality education, conduct training to connect people to careers, and serve their respective community needs.

The community college response to the COVID-19 situation is a testament to the college leadership and to the level of innovation, commitment, and adaptability of the college employee team.

Much like previous disasters that forced us to make adjustments in the middle of a semester, lessons will be learned so that we may come away from this even stronger than before. What the community colleges need the most right now during this legislative session is appropriation funding at the level that is needed to ensure economic recovery and growth.

I am very grateful to work with such talented people who ensured that the community college system’s services did not stop because of COVID-19. Mississippi Community College Board employees, along with innovative people at each of the fifteen community colleges, have pulled together to ensure we continue to serve our students, our businesses, and our communities. Keep up the good work, find innovative electronic methods to promote the social connections needed to support mental health, and most importantly, stay safe!
MPE invites its members to apply for classroom grant funding each year to try out a new idea or buy the “extras” for an already great lesson plan or project. Ninety-nine members submitted applications for the 2018-2019 school year, with forty-two receiving grants of up to $1,000 for their class projects and instructional program. We are pleased to spotlight several of the grants below for your enjoyment, as well as your reference for ideas for your own classroom.

**Anamaria Moore**  
**Vardaman High School, Biology I**  
**Interdependence of Plants and Animals via Aquatic Photosynthesis and Cellular Respiration**

Thank you to MPE for funding the classroom grant that added much needed technology to my Biology classroom! A Vernier sensor allowed my students to measure dissolved oxygen levels, which created data tables on an iPad that they analyzed to see the relationship between photosynthesis and cellular respiration. Not only did the new technology help them with their content knowledge, it also gave them a chance to take ownership of their learning because they were able to collect the data themselves. Before obtaining this technology, the only data we were able to collect was qualitative, but the sensor provided quantitative data, which gave them more practice and a better understanding of how evidence is collected and analyzed. This opportunity would not have been possible for them without the MPE classroom grant!

**Virginia McLaughlin**  
**St. Martin Middle School, 6th Grade Gifted**  
**A Collaboration of Hearts Through the Arts!**

With the MPE grant I received for $1000, I was able to purchase art supplies, musical instruments, a karaoke machine with microphones and CDs to implement a collaboration of my gifted students and the life skills students to celebrate the arts!! My gifted students were the mentors and led the life skills students in all of the arts activities! They developed valuable relationships with the students and learned to embrace their differences, yet they also saw how they were alike! The arts provided the perfect avenue to go on this magnificent journey!

**Gennella Graham**  
**Corinth High School, 9th Grade English**  
**U Matter Diversity Reading Center**

I sincerely thank you, MPE, for awarding me this classroom grant. My students love their U Matter Diverse Reading Center populated with their favorite novels. I now have some Jason Reynolds fans as well as Angie Thomas. Several have chosen both of these authors to further research and report on for their research papers. This reading center has extended past my classroom to other students dropping by to check out books and share their thoughts. Because of the appeal of this center, I have been approached by several students about starting a book club for next year. A fellow colleague has also inquired about us starting an African-American Voices Club next year because of the interest promoted with the reading of Dear Martin, Poet X, and The Hate U Give. One of my main goals was to encourage my students to start thinking about themselves and the world around them and to utilize the voice given to them. I wanted them to realize reading can be enjoyable and not just part of an assignment or meaningless. Through the use of this grant, I was able to create a reading center fully furnished with two bean bag chairs, two lava lamps, one very cool corner bookcase shelf, a Keurig with all the accessories, and about sixty books to add to our classroom library.
Mary Lynn Crotwell
Morton Elementary, Kindergarten
**Smarty Ants in the Class**

What an AWESOME opportunity MPE provided Morton Elementary School! Through the MPE Classroom Grant, technology was purchased for our beginners - Kindergarten Kiddos. New to Chromebooks, our kiddos quickly became skilled in techniques for soaring with meeting standards at a proficiency level in SmartyAnts and improving their overall STAR Early Literacy scale score. We were able to purchase four Chromebooks, which allowed for an additional technology center in the classroom designed to meet the exact needs of each student. Thanks, MPE, for adding to our success!

Paula Terry
Kosciusko Junior High School, Math
**Classroom Escape**

Special thanks to MPE for funding the classroom grant that provided a fun way for junior high students to practice and polish math skills. After teaching for twenty-five years, it is refreshing to see students eager, participating, and collaborating about math topics. My goals for the project have been met repeatedly since students ask to complete a math escape when work has been completed early. I was also able to share this grant with five other teachers, thus impacting more students’ learning.

Sara Stygles
Oak Grove Lower Elementary, 3rd Grade
**Making a Mark with MakerSpaces**

With my grant, I wanted to purchase items to create a MakerSpace in my classroom! Instead of having downtime in my class where students are not engaged in learning, the MakerSpace allows them to engage in STEM activities through the exploration of STEM bins, task cards, and building materials. On a more structured and closely monitored basis, they have had the option to work through the design process using computer programs like TinkerCAD™ and Silhouette ModelMaker™. These programs are for use with the QIDI Technology New Generation 3D Printer and the Silhouette Cameo 3. Students have been able to see their designs actually come to life through the use of these machines. Through the use of the MakerSpace, my students have been able to grow in their ability to design and take risks. I have seen my students show growth throughout the year in their willingness to problem-solve, work together as a team, and think outside the box for solutions that may not be immediately obvious. These materials will be available to students at OGLE for many years to come, so they will continue to encourage a love of STEM. MPE has my sincerest thanks for funding my project and making this MakerSpace a reality!

 Mechelle Brooks
Mize Attendance Center, 2nd-6th Grade Gifted
**Learn to Code**

Thank you, MPE, for funding the classroom grant that has provided the opportunity for my students to be introduced to the world of robotics and coding. Through this grant, I was able to purchase a six-pack of Dash robots with accessories from Wonder Workshop. The students use the STEM process to create codes for the robots to complete meaningful tasks while increasing their creativity, logical thinking, collaboration skills, and problem-solving skills. Every lesson is fascinating and forever changing. My students are thrilled to have so much fun and to still be learning!
HEART OF EDUCATION REMAINS CONSTANT AMONG CHANGES

It has been just a few short months since my last column for the MPE Journal and almost everything about life as we knew it has changed, at least for the time being. The Coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented situation for all of us. Higher education has been impacted greatly and we will not fully understand the impact for some time.

There are many unknowns at this point. We have transitioned from a mix of in-person and online instruction to online and other methods of remote instruction. You have had to adapt your instructional plans for this semester and the summer terms. We do not know how long this will last or what the ultimate financial impact on our universities or our students will be. All spring sports have been canceled, with the return of sports in the fall yet another unknown.

How we cope during this time is something that we are all learning together. We must control what we can. Now that we are teaching from home, it is important to create a space that is conducive to this. We must adapt our schedules, but it is important to have a schedule and maintain it. This can be particularly challenging for faculty members who have children who are now learning from home. At least for the time being, this is our new normal and we are all striving to adapt and embrace flexibility.

The good news is you are not alone. Although you may feel alone as you teach from home and may miss the camaraderie of your colleagues on campus, you are not alone. It is important to reach out if you need help. Your department chair, dean, and provost are there to help you navigate these uncertain times, whether you need help with technology, accessing resources, or identifying best practices.

While these are uncertain times, the heart of education, teaching and learning, has not changed. The care and attention you give your students may be shown virtually rather than in-person now that we are working remotely, but the care and attention remain constant. Many of your students are looking to you for reassurance and understanding and I know that you will be there for them, as you always are.

Thank you for your dedication to your students during these difficult, unprecedented times. We are facing many uncertainties now, but I know your commitment is unwavering and will continue to remain steadfast as we move from this era of uncertainty into the new normal that awaits us beyond the pandemic. This too shall pass. As the world seeks to recover from the impact of the pandemic, your work preparing the next generation of leaders will be more important than ever. Thank you again for all you do for your students, your university, and the state.
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