

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

MAKING  
AN  
IMPACT

MISSISSIPPI  
FIRST



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## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In this year's annual report, we are proud to tell you about the past year's accomplishments as well as our vision for the future. The last twelve months were filled with growth and change for Mississippi First. As you will see in the report, our team has grown to seven, including three hired in 2022 alone. These new staff members make it possible for us to continue to meet the challenges of the moment while also ensuring that our long-term commitments to policies like state-funded pre-K remain unchanged.

The highlights in this report include our work to pass a historic pay raise for Mississippi teachers as well as a landmark expansion of the early learning collaboratives, our state pre-K program. We also pioneered new projects in our charter school work, backed by two major new grants. We look forward to sharing these wins and more in our report.

Like Mississippi First, school children have also been working hard to overcome the aftermath of the pandemic. While scores on state tests have begun to recover, the state's recent results on NAEP, the Nation's Report Card, show that we still have a long way to go before we can fully put the pandemic in our rear view. Over the next year, we will continue to support the work of children, families, educators, and schools in increasing learning so that we do not jeopardize the tremendous progress our state has made over the last decade.

We hope that you will continue to support us as we fulfill our mission to ensure educational excellence for every Mississippi child. As always, thank you for your dedication and generosity—your donations, no matter the size, mean the world to us.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel".

**RACHEL CANTER**

Founder & Executive Director

# ABOUT MISSISSIPPI FIRST

Driven to change the fact that Mississippi has historically been last, Mississippi First set a bold vision: a Mississippi first in education nationally. Mississippi First is ready to dramatically accelerate our impact. We are dedicated to advancing the best education policy ideas through the policy continuum—research and analysis, public awareness and issue education, advocacy, implementation, and evaluation.

**We are a small but mighty team. Led by Rachel Canter and governed by a board of directors, we are dedicated to ensuring educational excellence for all Mississippi public school kids.**

## OUR FOCUS AREAS

Our work is focused on early education, the educator pipeline, public charter schools, and the future of schools.



**EARLY  
EDUCATION**



**TEACHERS AND  
LEADERS**



**PUBLIC CHARTER  
SCHOOLS**



**FUTURE OF  
SCHOOLS**

# OUR STAFF AND BOARD



**RACHEL CANTER**

Executive Director



**MACKENZIE HINES**

Chief of Staff



**MICAYLA TATUM**

Director of  
Early Childhood Policy



**TOREN BALLARD**

Director of K-12 Policy



**BROOKE WILLIAMS**

Associate Director of  
Communications



**PHERON RUSSELL**

Associate Director of  
Special Projects



**GRACE BREAZEALE**

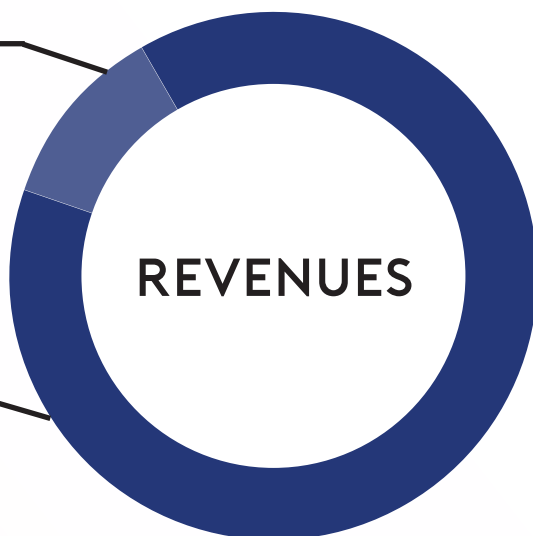
K-12 Policy Associate

**TIM ABRAM, III** | Board Chair  
**CATORIA MARTIN** | Board Treasurer  
**KATE GLUCKMAN** | Board Member

# OUR FINANCIALS

Grants without Donor Restrictions  
**\$758,378 (11.6%)**

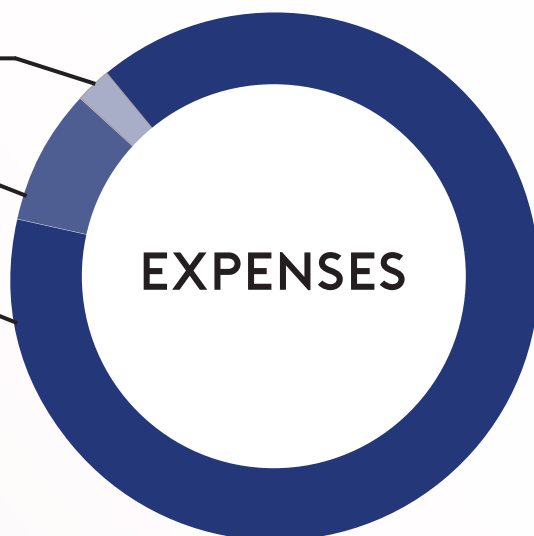
Grants with Donor Restrictions  
**\$8,038,337 (88.4%)**



Fundraising  
**\$15,235 (2%)**

Management and General  
**\$63,719 (8.4%)**

Program Services  
**\$682,902 (89.6%)**







# OUR MILESTONES

## QUARTER

# I

JUL 2021–SEPT 2021

*Released **Learning from the Moment: District Communications During a Pandemic** in July*

## QUARTER

# II

OCT 2021–DEC 2021

**Hired two additional employees: Associate Director of Early Childhood Policy and Special Projects Associate**

## QUARTER

# III

JAN 2022–MAR 2022

*Released **Voices of the Shortage: 2022 Mississippi Teacher Survey** report in January*

## QUARTER

# IV

APR 2022–JUN 2022

**Released the fourth brief in the 2021 *State of Pre-K* series in April**

**Released *Future of Schools: Supporting Families, Teachers, & Students* in November**

**Released *Resilience: COVID-19 Impact on Early Learning Collaboratives* in December**

**Successfully advocated a pay raise for teachers and teachers' assistants and pre-K funding**

**Launched the inaugural charter school fellowship program in June**

**Released a public memo to the State Board of Education to support the selection of the next state superintendent in June**



# EARLY EDUCATION

**25 %**  
of four-year-olds  
will have access to  
high-quality pre-K by  
fall 2023

This year, we successfully advocated another year of raising the per-pupil funding rate increase from \$2,150 to \$2,500 per child for another year. **In addition to the per-pupil rate, the legislature appropriated \$24M to expand the state-funded pre-K program.**

**As of December 1, 2022, we have 35 early learning collaboratives across the state—with the program nearly doubling in size in 2022 alone.**

## 2021 STATE OF PRE-K SERIES

We published the full *2021 State of Pre-K* series, including the fourth and final brief and the pre-K data dashboard, showcasing what access to quality pre-K looked like in 2017-2018.

## EXPANDING INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD

Mississippi First has expanded our focus beyond pre-K for four-year-olds to include early childhood, 0-3-year-olds.

## CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF ELCS

Mississippi celebrates 10 years of state-funded pre-K in 2023. Mississippi First launched the celebration of the anniversary starting in August 2022 with plans to declare the week of January 23, 2023, as Early Learning Collaborative Week.



# PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Mississippi First received nearly  
**\$40** million  
in grants to expand  
public charter schools  
in Mississippi

**Mississippi First received two major grants in 2022 to support the growth of high-quality charter schools in Mississippi.**

The first is from a prominent national foundation, while the second is a U.S. Department of Education grant. With these funds, Mississippi First will build the infrastructure to support charter schools in achieving quality while growing the sector.

**Mississippi currently has eight operating public charter schools, with two opening within the next few years.**

## FELLOWSHIP

Mississippi First partnered with Mississippi charter schools to provide a practical experience for interested educators to learn the operational and leadership-related tasks of a charter school in hopes of expanding the talent pool for Mississippi charter schools.

## LICENSURE

We extensively researched leadership and teacher licensure pathways for charter schools in Mississippi to understand barriers to becoming a school leader or licensed teacher. To address one area of concern, we launched a program to support teachers passing the Praxis exam, a current barrier to licensure for some Mississippi teachers.

## CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS GRANT

The U.S. Department of Education awarded Mississippi First a \$19.3 million, five-year Charter Schools Program grant to grow high-quality public charter schools in Mississippi. The Charter Schools Program (CSP) is a competitive, national grant program eligible to state entities. Through this program, Mississippi First will subgrant 90% of funds to eligible charter school applicants to open new charter schools and/or to replicate or expand high-quality charter schools.



# TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Secured an  
average raise of  
**\$5,151**  
for teachers and a  
\$2,000 raise for teacher  
assistants

We surveyed 1 in 6 Mississippi teachers and published our initial findings in a report titled, *Voices of the Shortage: 2022 Teacher Survey*. **Using the findings from our report, we successfully advocated a historic teacher pay raise during the 2022 legislative session.**

**During the 2022 session, the legislature also passed numerous other laws to help teachers and leaders in Mississippi:**

## PROCUREMENT CARDS

Mississippi teachers will now receive procurement cards by the beginning of the school year. Procurement cards are designated for teachers to purchase school supplies using a predetermined amount of state funds.

## BI-MONTHLY CHECKS

Districts now have an option to pay employees on a bi-monthly basis, compared to only having the option to pay employees monthly.

## LICENSURE

Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) must grant or renew licenses within 21 days of MDE receiving the completed application.



# FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

When the pandemic hit, Mississippi had an opportunity to re-evaluate our education system.

Mississippi First believes now is the moment for policymakers to begin thinking about new ideas for public schools as we regain a new normal after the pandemic. We detailed our vision for future schools in a policy brief that focuses on families, teachers, and students.

## FUTURE OF SCHOOLS POLICY BRIEF

We published a new policy vision that details three ways that Mississippi can work to improve education for all. Those three recommendations include:

**Align and Extend the School Day and School Year:** Juggling school and work schedules has long been overly difficult for most American families, and as children have returned to in-person school, we are more aware than ever that something needs to change.

**Re-Envision the Day-to-Day Role of a Teacher:** Every teacher knows that shouldering the weight of instructional or policy change often falls squarely on them, without any new resources, technical assistance, or time to manage the shift. It's time to re-envision what the role of a teacher is.

**Virtual Course Choice:** Finding great teachers for every higher-level or specialized course in every Mississippi district has proven difficult, especially for Mississippi's small and rural districts. A new virtual course choice program could fill this void.

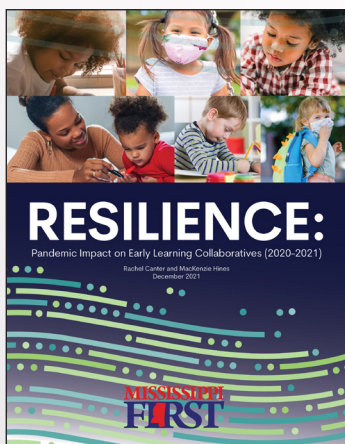
## SELECTING OUR NEXT STATE SUPERINTENDENT

We published a public memo to the State Board of Education to support the selection of a new state superintendent. This choice will not only be the most important decision the State Board makes this year; it will also be the most important decision they will make in the next several years.





# PUBLICATIONS



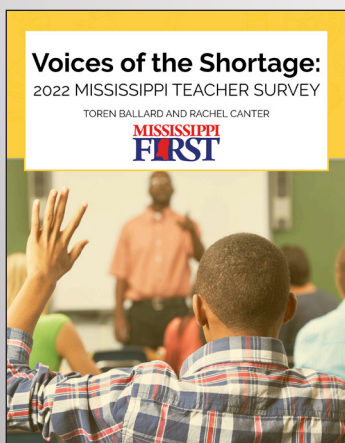
## ***Resilience: Pandemic Impact on Early Learning Collaboratives***

We learned how Mississippi's early learning collaboratives navigated the pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year.



## ***Future of Schools: Supporting Families, Teachers, & Students***

In an effort to support families, teachers, and students, we published a new policy vision that details three ways Mississippi can work to improve education for all.



## ***Voices of the Shortage:***

### ***2022 Mississippi Teacher Survey***

Building on our *Nothing in the Pipes: Educator Crisis in Mississippi* report, we surveyed 6,496 Mississippi teachers to establish the state's most comprehensive resource for understanding the critical teacher shortage in Mississippi from teachers' perspectives.


## 2021 State of Pre-K Briefs

In a continuation of the *State of Pre-K* series, Mississippi First released the 2021 *State of Pre-K* briefs\*, which focuses on child outcomes, teacher qualifications, and access to pre-K in Mississippi during the 2017-2018 school year.

*\*The fourth and final brief was published in 2022 and the others were published in 2021.*

[illegible]

***Public Schools and Collaborative Pre-K Programs and Kindergarten Readiness in 2017-2018***



# STATE OF PRE-K SERIES: BRIEF

## Poverty and Pre-K Access in Mississippi, 2018

Research Brief by Rachel Carter and Andrew Van Horn

### BACKGROUND

Research increasingly shows that children living in poverty receive the greatest benefit from pre-K. For this reason, each version of our *Pre-K Report* has included a brief overview of poverty in Mississippi and across the nation. In this brief, we provide an overview of the state's poverty and the impact of poverty on children's access to pre-K. We also provide a brief overview of the state's poverty and the impact of poverty on children's access to pre-K. We also provide a brief overview of the state's poverty and the impact of poverty on children's access to pre-K.

 <h4>HEAD START</h4> <p>Head Start is a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start. It provides comprehensive, holistic child development, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to low-income children.</p>	 <h4>BLENDED HEAD START</h4> <p>Blended Head Start is a program that combines Head Start and pre-K services. It provides comprehensive, holistic child development, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to low-income children.</p>	 <h4>SCHOOL DISTRICTS</h4> <p>School districts are local government entities that are responsible for providing public education. They provide comprehensive, holistic child development, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to low-income children.</p>	 <h4>COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS</h4> <p>Collaborative programs are programs that involve multiple agencies working together to provide comprehensive, holistic child development, health, nutrition, and family engagement services to low-income children.</p>
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Working Paper 2018 | The Center for Early Childhood Policy and Programs | The University of Mississippi, 387 | Working Paper Series, November 2018, 2021 | [https://www.centerforearlychildhoodpolicy.org/publications/mississippi\\_pre\\_k\\_brief\\_2018.pdf](https://www.centerforearlychildhoodpolicy.org/publications/mississippi_pre_k_brief_2018.pdf)

**Mississippi Pre-K Page 1**

### Poverty and Pre-K Access in Mississippi in 2017-2018

[illegible]

### ***Pre-K Teacher Qualifications in 2017-2018***

**MISSISSIPPI FIRST**  
The State of Mississippi

# STATE OF PRE-K SERIES: BRIEF

## Access to Pre-K, 2017-2018

Research Brief by Rachel Carter and Micayla Tatum

### INTRODUCTION

Access to quality pre-K has long been an advocacy focus of Mississippi First. When we began our work over a decade ago, we immediately found support that the state had no early care and education (ECE) information quantifying four-year-old pre-K access to pre-K, let alone other access to quality pre-K, at either the state or community levels. We set out to change this, first by analyzing available data to ideas proposed in the *State Policy Report* in 2012 and then by publishing our own report, *Access to Pre-K*, the *State of Mississippi Pre-K Report*, in 2013. This latter report was the first of the ECE information program we have both published and held Start programs in the district level in Mississippi.

In the second iteration of this report, we were able to estimate an overall pre-K access rate for four-year-olds across all providers by combining data from public schools, child care, and licensed childcare. This iteration, finally, examined the 2014-2015 school year, gave us our first final look at pre-K access statewide. It also allowed us to see how public school access had changed since 2011-2012.

**This report attempts our third look at access to pre-K and again combines data from public school, Head Start, and licensed childcare. As in our previous work, we calculate pre-K access rates for the state, each county, and each school district. We report overall access rates for four-year-olds (access to all types of pre-K combined) by county and report public pre-K access rates for public kindergarten by school district. Finally, we provide context and analysis, including an examination of how access has changed since our last report.**

Mississippi First Page 1

### Access to Pre-K, 2017-2018

# 2023 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**In FY23, our work will focus on public charter schools, access to quality early education with a focus on pre-K, and increasing effective teachers and leaders in Mississippi public schools.**

## **PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS**

Our work in charter schools will focus on creating the conditions for high-quality seat growth, including supporting new school incubation, access to facilities, new talent pipelines, quality initiatives, and advocacy.

## **EARLY EDUCATION**

We will shift our focus to ensuring quality in the collaborative program as it scales, protecting the gains we have made since 2013, and deepening our work in the 0-5 space through childcare research and advocacy.

## **TEACHERS AND LEADERS**

We will release a series of briefs on our findings from our November 2021 teacher survey. We will also continue to support legislation that will increase access to quality teachers.

## **FUTURE OF SCHOOLS**

We will support the Mississippi Department of Education as they transition to a new state superintendent and advocate policies that support public schools as they navigate the fallout from the pandemic.





**Mississippi First is a 501c3 public policy nonprofit that champions transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.**

**Mississippi First is a leading voice for state-funded pre-K, high-quality public charter schools, rigorous state learning standards, and commonsense testing and accountability policies. We are also actively engaged in improving Mississippi's educator pipeline.**