



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Shaping Our Future

MISSISSIPPI
FIRST

Driven by the fact that Mississippi has historically been last, our founders set a bold vision: a Mississippi first in education nationally.

Mississippi First is dramatically accelerating our impact. We are dedicated to advancing the best education ideas through the policy continuum—research and analysis, public awareness and issue education, advocacy, implementation, and evaluation.

A small but mighty team led by Rachel Canter and governed by a board of directors, Mississippi First champions transformative policy solutions, ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.

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We are proud

to present to you this year's annual report, which contains another

year full of advances for children. Our team, now eight

strong, has worked hard to broaden and deepen our work as well as ensure that Mississippi First has the organizational infrastructure to support moving further and faster in the future.

Among our programmatic achievements this year are two more reports on the problem of the educator pipeline. These reports use new analysis of two teacher voice surveys to continue to raise awareness of the difficulty Mississippi teachers have in achieving financial stability, especially in the face of recent inflation. We also published a seminal case study looking at the passage and implementation of the Early Learning

Collaborative Act as part of our celebration of the act's tenth year. Finally, the pages of this document further explain our other work to provide support, analysis, and vision for the early childhood sector, the public charter school sector, and the broader world of public education in Mississippi.

Each year, I ask that you continue to support our mission to ensure educational excellence for every Mississippi child, and this year is no different. I hope your review of our progress compels you to continue to walk this path with us. We sincerely thank you for your donations, no matter their size, and your belief in what we are trying to do for the children of Mississippi.

In service,

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

RACHEL CANTER
Executive Director

"Mississippi First continues to make a difference for children, even as the world continues to evolve post-pandemic. I am so proud of our expanded team that brings tremendous energy and passion to each new challenge." ——— **RACHEL CANTER**



RACHEL CANTER
Executive Director



TOMEKA CHEATHAM
Director of Operations



BROOKE WILLIAMS
Director of Communications



TOREN BALLARD
Director of K-12 Policy



MICAYLA TATUM
Director of Early Childhood Policy



GRACE BREAZEALE
K-12 Policy Associate



PHERON RUSSELL
Director of Special Projects



LINDA CALDWELL
Charter Schools Program Coordinator

Tim Abram, II • Board Chair | **Catoria Martin** • Board Treasurer
Kate Gluckman • Board Member | **Ki Harris** • Board Member







The mission of Mississippi First

is to champion transformative policy solutions, ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child. Our work is focused on four areas.



EARLY EDUCATION

After successfully advocating the passage and expansion of the Early Learning Collaborative Act, Mississippi's state-funded pre-K program, we are dedicated to ensuring quality as the program scales, protecting our gains since 2013, and deepening our work in the 0-5 space through research and advocacy.



PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

We support high-quality charter schools and are dedicated to creating the conditions for high-quality seat growth, including supporting new school incubation, access to facilities, new talent pipelines, quality initiatives, and advocacy.



TEACHERS AND LEADERS

As part of our educator pipeline work, we support and advocate policy solutions that will increase equitable access to quality teachers and leaders.



FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

The pandemic showcased the ways in which our education system serves many students poorly. Within our future of schools focus area, we research and promote policy solutions to the challenges that impact the future of schools.





We celebrated 10 years of the Early Learning Collaborative Act with a week of activities highlighting its successes. For this special milestone, we produced a case study, *Transforming Pre-K in Mississippi*, which tells the story of the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013. During the 2023 legislative session, we also successfully raised the rate of per-pupil funding for pre-K and secured access to the program for at least 25% of four-year-olds.



EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVES

As part of our anniversary celebration, we organized a massive art installation of yard butterflies on the Capitol Green representing the more than 25,000 four-year-olds who were impacted by the program. We marked January 23-27 as Early Learning Collaborative Week with a proclamation from the governor. Lastly, we spotlighted every early learning collaborative in the state to highlight their work and build awareness.

WE RAISED THE RATE!

2023'S HOUSE BILL 817

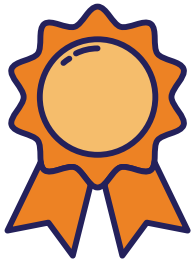
We finally passed the bill to permanently raise the rate of per-pupil pre-K funding to a minimum of \$5,000 per child (\$2,500 in state funds). In addition to the per-pupil rate, the legislature appropriated \$24M to continue the state-funded pre-K program.

EXPANDING INTO 0-5

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Mississippi First publically announced its plan to expand into the 0-5 space. We kicked off this new focus by working with partners on the recommendations for a quality improvement system for childcare, building relationships with early childhood leaders, and listening to the needs of educators and professionals.





We expanded our support to charter schools in 2023 through our work to implement the Charter Schools Program Grant. We also relaunched the Mississippi Charter Schools Association by hiring Jonas Crenshaw as the Executive Director. Finally, we marked 10 years of the Mississippi Charter Schools Act by participating in a summit about how to improve the charter sector in the next five years.

10 YEARS OF CHARTERS

MISSISSIPPI CHARTER SCHOOLS ACT OF 2013

It's been 10 years since the enactment of the Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013. We led a digital campaign to raise awareness and revamped our charter schools reporter's guide resource. We collaborated with Embark to host an event where charter school leaders could celebrate the successes of the program and talk about improvements.

MISSISSIPPI CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPORT

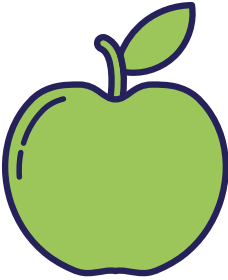
Alongside partners, we hired Jonas Crenshaw to be the Executive Director of the Mississippi Charter Schools Association, which will launch initiatives and programs to grow the sector, support operating schools, and provide a voice for charter schools within the public education system.

IMPLEMENTING THE CSP GRANT

CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM GRANT

In 2023, we hired Linda Caldwell as our Charter Schools Program Grant Coordinator. With her support, we have provided technical assistance to our first subgrantee, Instant Impact Global Prep.





Ensuring a strong educator pipeline

has been one of our primary goals since 2019. In 2023, we focused on understanding how the 2022 historic pay raise affected teachers and what we may need to do going forward.

OUR 2023 RESEARCH

EYING THE EXIT

In January 2023, we published the second major report in our series about the financial viability of the teaching profession. This report took a deeper dive into the data in our report, *Voices of the Shortage: 2022 Mississippi Teacher Survey*. Central to the report is our examination of attrition risk and teachers' standard of living, which we used to make the case that financial insecurity drives teachers' desire to exit the classroom. Lastly, we offer recommendations for policymakers to address teacher turnover and strengthen every facet of Mississippi's educator pipeline.

FALLING BEHIND

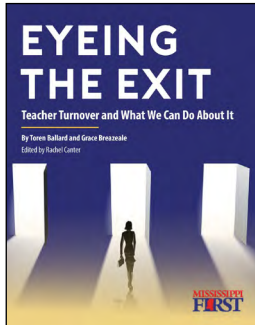
A year after the historic raise, Mississippi continued to see high levels of teacher attrition. We turned back to our reliable tool, surveying teachers, to confirm our hypothesis that record inflation, which reached a peak in 2022, was cutting into the gains promised by the teacher salary increase. In September 2023, we published the findings of the 2022-2023 Mississippi Teacher Survey, which confirmed that record high inflation has largely negated the impact of the teacher pay raise.





Mississippi First serves

as a voice of reason for policymakers and provides guidance to them on where public education in Mississippi is heading. In 2022-2023, we provided valuable advice to the Mississippi Department of Education and the Mississippi Legislature. Much of this advice and guidance happens behind the scenes.



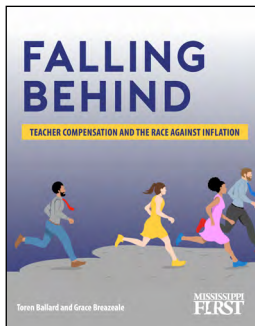
Eyeing the Exit: Teacher Turnover and What We Can Do About It

We took a deeper dive into the data we reported in our February 2022 report, *Voices of the Shortage: 2022 Mississippi Teacher Survey*, which uncovered that over half of teachers surveyed reported being “somewhat” or “very likely” to leave their Mississippi classroom.



Transforming Pre-K in Mississippi: The Story of the Early Learning Collaborative Act

We recount the remarkable story of the early learning collaboratives and how the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013 changed early education in Mississippi.



Falling Behind: Teacher Compensation and the Race Against Inflation

Following the historic pay raise in 2022, Mississippi continued to see high levels of teacher turnover. We conducted another teacher survey to confirm that record high inflation largely negated the impact of the teacher pay raise.

OUR FINANCIALS

Grants without Donor Restrictions
\$77,709 (17.2%)

Grants with Donor Restrictions
\$374,808 (82.8%)

REVENUES

Fundraising
\$14,546 (0.6%)

Management and General
\$58,879 (2.44%)

Program Services
\$2,343,809 (96.96%)

EXPENSES

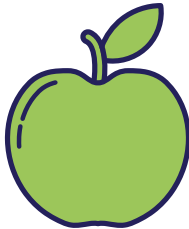
Mississippi First operates on a fiscal year, June-July. Due to accrual accounting rules, revenues supporting FY23 expenses were booked as "received" in a prior year.

IN 2024, we plan to introduce research-backed policy recommendations and continue programs that will touch each of our focus areas.



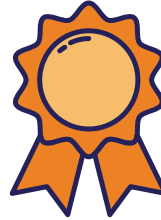
EARLY EDUCATION

While continuing to support pre-K, we will expand our focus to researching and improving the childcare system with emphasis on quality and childcare educator pay and licensure.



TEACHERS AND LEADERS

We will continue to support our recommendations for another teacher pay raise and other incentives like teacher loan forgiveness.



PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

We will deepen our work to support charter schools and advocate significant changes to the charter school law in the hopes of changing and improving the trajectory of approved charter schools.



FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

We will continue to be a voice of reason for policymakers and for a Mississippi first in education.



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