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Excellence for All
ANNUAL REPORT

21



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A person with curly hair is seen from the side, looking at a bulletin board. The bulletin board is covered with various papers, including a large white sheet with yellow markings and a smaller yellow sheet. The background is blurred, showing a room with a wooden frame and a white wall. The word "Excellence" is written in a white, cursive font at the bottom of the image.

Excellence



For All

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



DEAR *Supporters,*

Are we there yet?

For the last eighteen months, I've felt like the kid in the back of the car, waiting—impatiently—for the pandemic to end. In reality, we now know that our new destination is not an “end” to the pandemic as much as it is an accommodation: 2021 has been the year when we all learned to live with COVID.

For Mississippi First, learning to live with COVID has meant accelerating the pace of our work to meet the demands of the moment. In the last year, Mississippi First has published more research and tools than ever before, supported a teacher pay raise and a teacher loan repayment program, and advocated the largest expansion of our state pre-K program in history (\$16M!). In this report, you'll find descriptions of each of our projects as well as what we're already working on for 2022.

We know we're not “there” quite yet with life after COVID, just like we're not “there” quite yet with ensuring education after COVID is better than before. Every Mississippi child deserves access to a quality education, and we still have a long way to go. We promise to continue to support policies that make educational excellence accessible to all children. We hope we can count on your continued support as we work to make Mississippi first.

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

RACHEL CANTER
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Mississippi First

ENSURING A MISSISSIPPI FIRST IN EDUCATION

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.**

Now in our second decade, 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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



LeKesha Perry
Board Chair



Catoria Martin
Board Treasurer



Kate Gluckman
Board Member



Adam Smith
Board Member



Tim Abram, II
Board Member

OUR TEAM



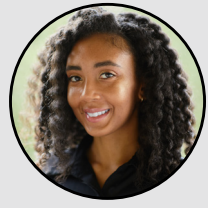
Rachel Canter
Executive Director



Toren Ballard
K-12 Policy Director



MacKenzie Hines
Chief of Staff



Brooke Williams
Policy & Communications
Associate



OUR MISSION & VALUES

Mississippi First's mission is to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child. We envision a Mississippi first in **prosperity, innovation, and quality of life**. To accomplish this goal, our work is dedicated to **increasing educational achievement and graduation rates and decreasing achievement gaps**. We value engagement, results, collaboration, transparency, non-partisanship, accountability, and equity.

Today's students not only must measure up to their hometown peers; they must also compete against students across the state, the country, and the world.

OUR *focus areas*

1. PRE-K
2. CHARTER SCHOOLS
3. STANDARDS, TESTING, & ACCOUNTABILITY
4. EDUCATOR PIPELINE
5. FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

YEAR IN REVIEW

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FISCAL YEAR 2021

SECURING \$16M FOR PRE-K

Our biggest 2021 win was successfully advocating a historic \$16M expansion of our state pre-K program. We also worked with the legislature to continue the \$5,000 per-child rate for pre-K, which ensures programs have enough funds to provide a quality experience. We are looking to make this change permanent in 2022. Finally, we continued to provide guidance and support to the Mississippi Department of Education by updating the *How to Start an Early Learning Collaborative* toolkit and our *State of Pre-K* research briefs.

CONTINUING OUR SUPPORT FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

This year, Mississippi First continued to support charter schools in Mississippi by working with schools to champion better charter school policy and procedures from the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. We are looking forward to working to expand high-quality charter schools in Mississippi in 2022.

CREATING RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS FOR THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

Mississippi First developed a database of 2020-2021 school re-opening plans for families that was viewed by thousands across the state. We also created a guide to help school districts establish one-to-one technology initiatives with their new devices and worked with partners to support broadband access. Finally, Mississippi First advised school districts on communicating effectively with families.

Moving Mississippi Forward

LEADERS IN POLICY • EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

FOCUSING ON SETTING HIGH **STANDARDS WITH HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM**

Mississippi First worked with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to provide teachers with access to high-quality curriculum. We designed and published materials for teachers to help them be part of the materials selection process in their schools. We also worked with teacher ambassadors to raise awareness about the newly approved curriculum options in English and math.

ANALYZING THE **EDUCATOR **PIPELINE** CRISIS IN MISSISSIPPI**

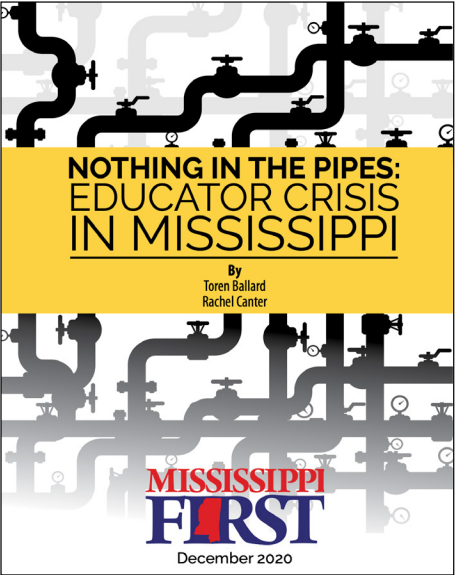
Mississippi First collected and analyzed data about the current educator pipeline to understand the barriers preventing aspiring teachers from entering the profession. With this data, Mississippi First wrote a report examining Mississippi's educator pipeline and providing recommendations for policymakers. During the 2021 legislative session, we worked with the legislature to increase teachers' and teacher assistants' salaries and supported a new teacher loan repayment program.

PUBLICATIONS

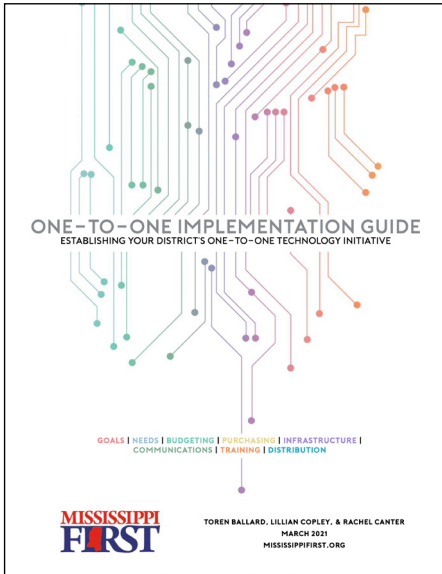
PROVIDING EXPERT ADVICE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

At Mississippi First, all our work is rooted in research and analysis. We use data to guide us to a nuanced understanding of problems and solutions. The last year was a banner year for us. We published multiple reports, briefs, and toolkits to promote policies and programs that increase educational excellence for Mississippi kids.

2020 PUBLICATIONS



2021 PUBLICATIONS



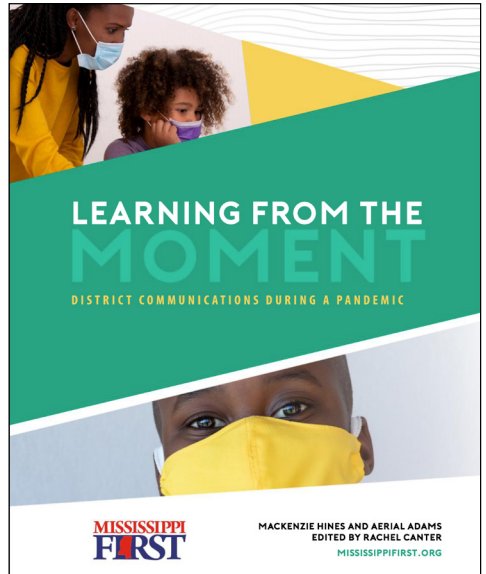
ONE-TO-ONE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

ESTABLISHING YOUR DISTRICT'S ONE-TO-ONE TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

GOALS | NEEDS | BUDGETING | PURCHASING | INFRASTRUCTURE | COMMUNICATIONS | TRAINING | DISTRIBUTION

MISSISSIPPI FIRST
MAY 2021

TOREN BALLARD, LILLIAN COPELY, & RACHEL CANTER
MARCH 2021
MISSISSIPPIFIRST.ORG



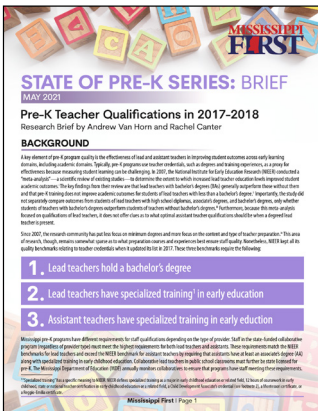
LEARNING FROM THE MOMENT

DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

MISSISSIPPI FIRST

MACKENZIE HINES AND AERIAL ADAMS
EDITED BY RACHEL CANTER
MISSISSIPPIFIRST.ORG

STATE OF PRE-K BRIEFS



STATE OF PRE-K SERIES: BRIEF

MAY 2021

Pre-K Teacher Qualifications in 2017-2018

Research Brief by Andrew Van Horn and Rachel Canter

BACKGROUND

Mississippi's pre-K program is the first of its kind in the United States, and it is a critical component of the state's early childhood education system. The program is designed to provide high-quality, evidence-based early learning experiences for all four-year-olds in Mississippi. The program is a partnership between the state and local communities, and it is a key component of the state's early childhood education system. The program is designed to provide high-quality, evidence-based early learning experiences for all four-year-olds in Mississippi. The program is a partnership between the state and local communities, and it is a key component of the state's early childhood education system.

1. Lead teachers hold a bachelor's degree
2. Lead teachers have specialized training in early education
3. Assistant teachers have specialized training in early education

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STATE OF PRE-K SERIES: BRIEF

MAY 2021

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

Research Brief by Rachel Canter and Andrew Van Horn

BACKGROUND

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STATE OF PRE-K SERIES: BRIEF

MAY 2021

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

Research Brief by Rachel Canter and Andrew Van Horn

BACKGROUND

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

Pre-K Teacher Qualifications in 2017-2018

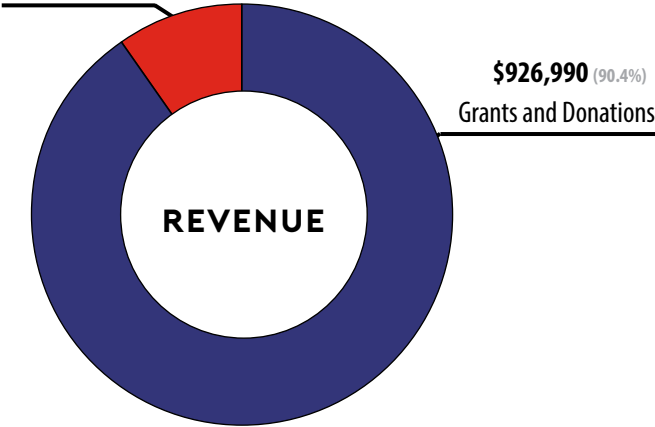
Poverty and Pre-K Access in Mississippi in 2017-2018

FINANCIALS

SNAPSHOT OF OUR OPERATIONAL EXPENSES AND REVENUES

\$98,000 (9.6%)

Contract Services



\$926,990 (90.4%)

Grants and Donations

\$55,607 (6.01%)

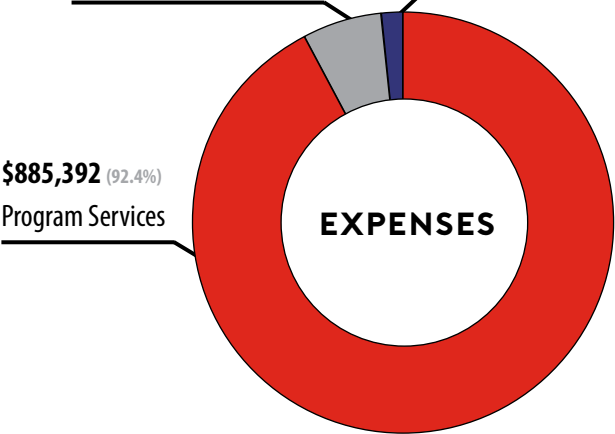
Management and General

\$14,339 (1.55%)

Fundraising

\$885,392 (92.4%)

Program Services



A close-up photograph of a woman with curly hair and a young girl with curly hair, both smiling and looking down at something they are holding together. The woman is on the left, wearing an orange top, and the girl is on the right, wearing a pink shirt with a lace collar. The background is blurred, showing other people in a classroom or community setting.

OUR *Thank You*

Even in one of the most uncertain years of our time, we continue to make progress for Mississippi kids. As always, we want to thank you and remind you that without your dedication and generosity, none of this would be possible.

STRATEGIC PLAN

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022



PRE-K

WE WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K OPTIONS THROUGH RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY WORK.

RESEARCH: Build policy expertise specific to childcare issues to match our expertise on state-funded pre-K.

ISSUE EDUCATION: Continue to build public support for pre-K through publication of research.

ADVOCACY: Make the FY21 and FY22 \$5,000 per-child pre-K rate permanent by amending the authorizing legislation to lock in the change.

IMPLEMENTATION: Support MDE in expanding pre-K after the FY21 legislative increase.



CHARTER SCHOOLS

WE WILL FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING THE CHARTER SCHOOL SECTOR.

ADVOCACY: Support currently operating charter schools in policy discussions before the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board.

IMPLEMENTATION: Provide resources to current and aspiring charter schools.

Mississippi Kids, First!

MISSISSIPPI KIDS DESERVE ACCESS TO QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION



EDUCATOR PIPELINE

WE WILL CONTINUE TO STUDY THE EDUCATOR PIPELINE IN MISSISSIPPI AND ADVANCE POLICY SOLUTIONS THAT WILL INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO QUALITY TEACHERS.

RESEARCH: Collect data on teacher attrition and career trajectory trends in order to evaluate implications for pension sustainability.

RESEARCH: Conduct a statewide, scientific teacher voice survey of current (and, if possible, aspiring) teachers to collect data on relevant educator pipeline issues.

ADVOCACY: Continue to advance recommendations from the *Nothing in the Pipes* report.

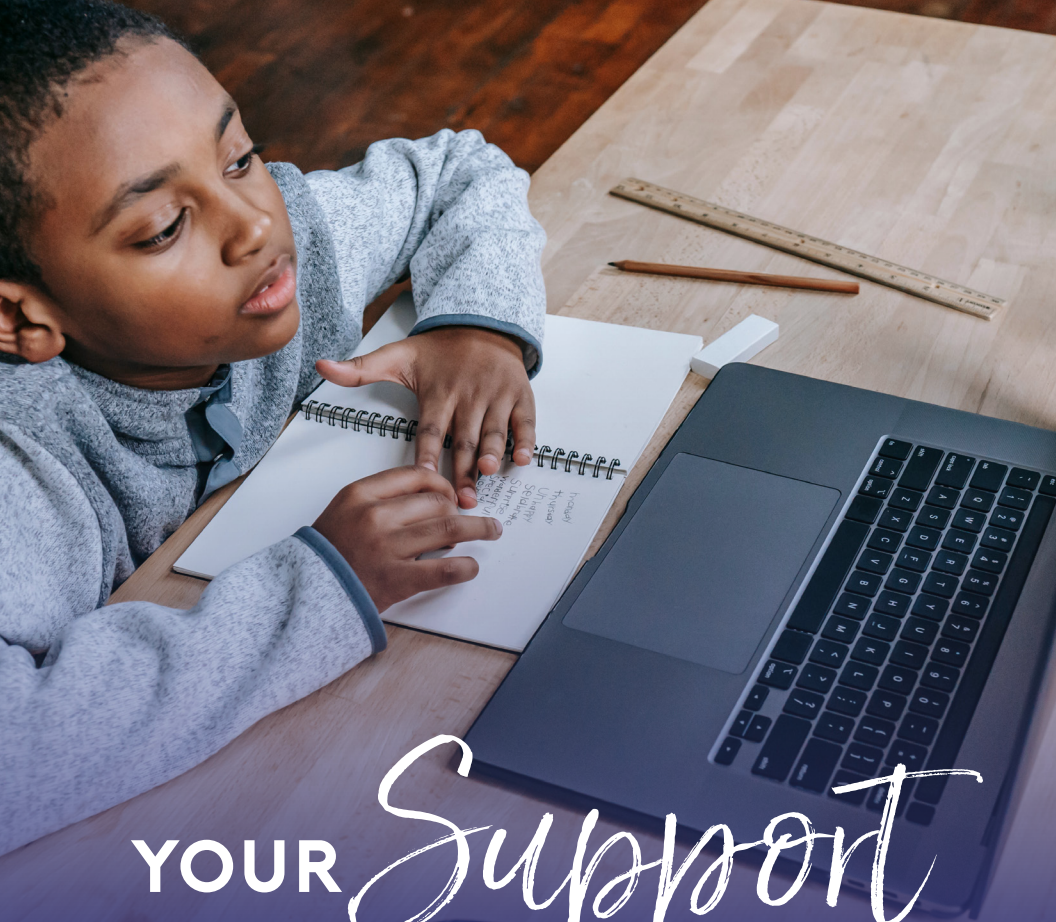


FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

WE WILL PROMOTE A POLICY VISION FOR POST-PANDEMIC SCHOOLING.

RESEARCH: Develop a vision for post-pandemic schooling, including a summary of improvements needed and policies to achieve them.

ISSUE EDUCATION: Continue to educate schools about 1:1 and communications strategies based on FY21 Mississippi First publications.



YOUR *Support*

We envision a Mississippi first in educational excellence.

Our work is funded through individual donors like you!

Please help us continue to fulfill our bold vision: a Mississippi first in education nationally.

A *Mississippi First* IN EDUCATION

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.

