



Annual Report 2014

Leaders in Policy. Excellence in Education.

MISSISSIPPI
FIRST

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“Through first-class education, a generation marches down the long uncertain road of the future with confidence.” - *Wynton Marsalis*

Dear *Supporter,*

Mississippi First believes that all children in Mississippi should have access to an excellent education. We work diligently each year to create and support education policies that raise the standard of education in our state and provide students with the chance to “march down the road of the future with confidence.” The past two years have been transformative for Mississippi First. Additional funding in FY2014 allowed us to add three new team members who have each deepened our work in their respective areas. Over the last year, we expanded our work in sex ed, started new work to support the Common Core State Standards, and supported high-quality implementation of the new preK and charter school laws. We have also dramatically improved our ability to tell our story and engage the public through the work of our new Director of Communications. We are enthusiastic about what the future holds for Mississippi First and hope we can count on your support as we move closer to ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.

Sincerely,



Rachel Canter

Rachel Canter
Executive Director



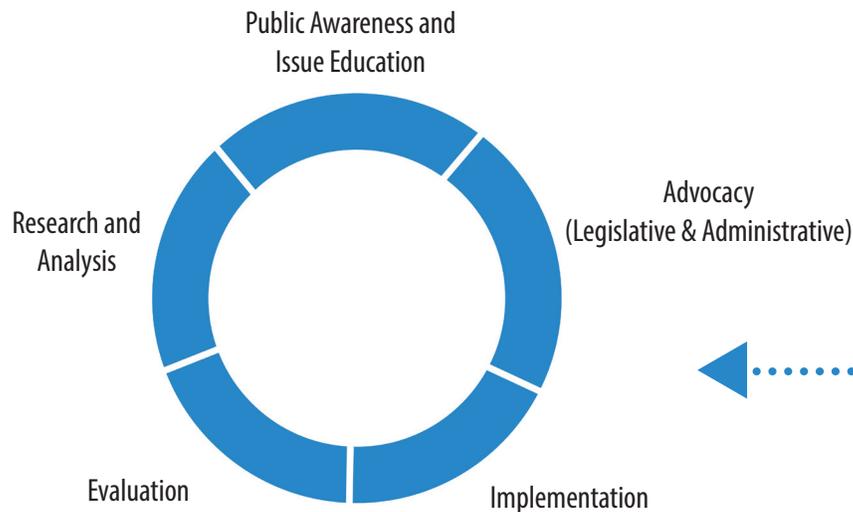
Matt Bengloff

Matt Bengloff
Interim Board Chair

Mission

To champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.

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



Values

1 RESULTS

We only support policies which are backed by high-quality research and have the potential to solve or alleviate entrenched problems.

2 ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others, especially those who influence education, accountable for truth, transparency, and results.

3 TRANSPARENCY

We foster honest dialogue about policy research, options, and challenges of different solutions, and willingly communicate our priorities, goals, and strategies to the public and policymakers.

4 ENGAGEMENT

We build relationships within and among local communities to increase citizen voice and engagement especially about important education issues facing Mississippi.

5 EQUITY

We believe all children in Mississippi deserve educational excellence and prioritize those who are or have been underserved.

6 NON-PARTISANSHIP

We work with policymakers, politicians, and members of the public who share our goals, regardless of ideology or political party.

7 COLLABORATION

We form partnerships with organizations and youth with similar goals in order to amplify our collective efforts to better Mississippi.

Our Story

From the **Beginning**

Some might say the creation of Mississippi First started long before its launch in 2008. Sanford and Rachel met riding the school bus in elementary school over 20 years ago. They formed a friendship that would last beyond their years as public school students in Starkville, MS. As time passed, their paths continued to cross. They both became teachers in the Mississippi Delta, and later they both went to school to study public policy—Rachel at the Harvard Kennedy School and Sanford at the Clinton School for Public Service. While they share many experiences, their strongest commonality is that they both have a deep desire to improve education in their home state. This desire led Rachel and Sanford to the idea of Mississippi First.



The **1st** Five Years



In 2008, Rachel and Sanford founded Mississippi First (MSF) as a nonprofit organization dedicated to moving Mississippians forward through education reform. They launched the website www.mississippifirst.org in December 2008 to provide information about education reform and policy work in Mississippi. In March 2009, MSF officially formed its first Board of Directors. Also that year, MSF joined the PIE Network in order to receive support in the process of education advocacy at the state level. In 2010, Mississippi First played a major role in helping the Mississippi Department of Education apply for the new School Improvement Grants program, which brought Mississippi

“We are just Mississippians who want to make our state better.”

-One Day, Rachel Canter, Summer 2014



\$47M in grants for low-performing schools. Also, in 2010, MSF took a lead role in improving access to sex education by developing the CHART (Creating Healthy and Responsible Teens) Initiative. CHART works to reduce teen pregnancy, improve teen sexual health, and increase responsible decision-making. During these first few years, Mississippi First was working diligently on issue education and advocacy for state-funded preK and charter schools. In 2013, this work came to fruition. The Mississippi Legislature passed the *Mississippi Public Charter Schools Act*, which was based on recommendations from MSF. The Legislature also passed the *Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013*, modeled after a report published by Mississippi First titled, "Leaving Last in Line." That summer, Mississippi First received two capacity grants to expand their work in Mississippi. The organization added 3 new staff members by January 2014: a Deputy Director of Policy, a Director of Communications, and a Teen Health Policy Coordinator.

The Next **5** Years

Mississippi First continues to grow its capacity to make an even larger impact on the state. Over the next few years, Mississippi First hopes to expand access to quality sex education and health services for young people, expand access to quality preK, and build a high-quality charter school sector in Mississippi. The organization is also working to identify new policies that will help Mississippi move closer to ensuring an excellent education for every Mississippi child.

PreKindergarten

Mississippi First is an active advocate for preK in the state of Mississippi and has worked hard to pass legislation that supports early childhood education and promotes state-funded preK. We have an overall vision of growing high-quality preK opportunities for Mississippi children.

2013

The *Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013*, authored by Senator Brice Wiggins and Representative Toby Barker, is the first-ever state-funded preK program in Mississippi.

Today

11

In December 2013, the first round of the Early Learning Collaborative awards were given to 11 different collaboratives from around the state.

2K

The new state-funded preK collaboratives will create almost 2,000 new high-quality preK seats in Mississippi in the 2014-2015 school year.

Implementation

Support to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

MSF has partnered with MDE to support the implementation of the new preK law. Though our expertise is policy, we believe our role is to support high-quality programs and research-based interventions, regardless of provider. We have been able to provide resources and host collaborative meetings in order to facilitate a professional learning community among the approved collaboratives and to broaden our understanding of what works in the preK collaborative model.

8

Advocacy

PreK Tax Credit Awareness Events

MSF partnered with the Committee for Economic Development to host an event to garner support from the business community in expanding preK across the state. Specifically, we raised awareness of the 1:1 state tax credit included in the bill to incentivize business/community support of preK collaboratives.

Improvements to the Legislation

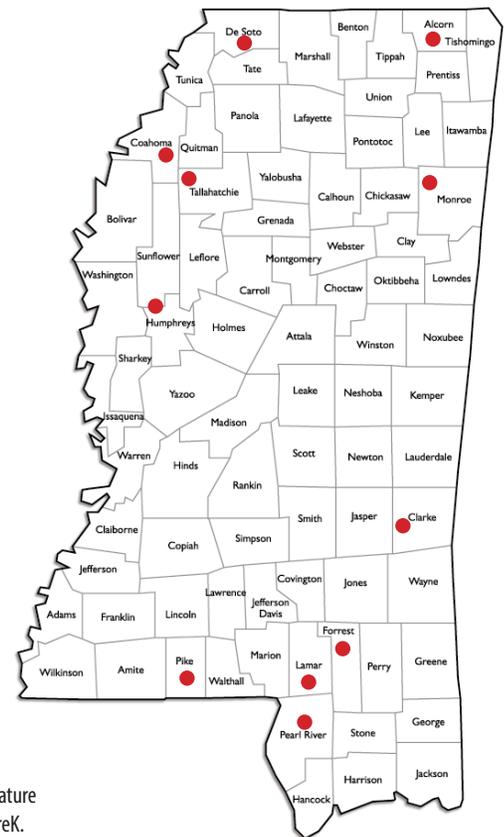
We are continuing to work with the Legislature to fund additional preK seats and make needed updates to the law.

“Mississippi can take action to solve its problem of inadequate school readiness and finally lead the achievement line: forty years of excellent research support the achievement-boosting, life-long benefits of high-quality preKindergarten programs.”

-Leaving Last in Line: Making PreK a Reality in Mississippi, Rachel Canter

2014-2015 MDE-Approved Collaboratives

| Collaborative | Lead Partner |
|---|--|
| Gilmore Early Learning Initiative Collaborative | Gilmore Early Learning Initiative, Inc. |
| Clarke County Early Learning Partnership | Quitman School District |
| Coahoma County Pre-K Collaborative | Clarksdale Municipal School District |
| Desoto County Collaborative | Desoto County School District |
| McComb Community Collaborative for Early Learning Success | McComb School District |
| Lamar County Early Learning Collaborative | Lamar County School District |
| Petal Early Learning Collaborative | Petal School District |
| Picayune School District Early Head Start | Picayune School District |
| Sunflower County Early Learning Collaborative | Sunflower/Humphreys Counties Progress Inc. |
| Tallahatchie County Collaborative | Tallahatchie Early Learning Alliance |
| The Corinth-Alcorn-Prentiss Early Learning Collaborative | Corinth School District |



41

41 states have state-funded preK.

34

34% of Mississippi school districts budgeted a combined \$12,419,196.40 in Title I dollars for preK services in the 2011-2012 school year.

\$3M

The Mississippi State Legislature allocated \$3 million for preK.

Charter Schools

ADVOCACY **BY THE numbers**

2013

Under the *Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013*, a seven-member authorizing board solicits and approves charter school applications for both new schools and conversions.

TODAY

1 charter school has been approved, **Relmagine Prep**, which will open in Jackson, MS in the fall of 2015.

3

Mississippi First created 3 charter school web brochures and 3 charter school informational videos. These materials have been viewed over 7,000 times through social media, the MSF newsletter, and MSF website.

14

Mississippi First met with 14 different legislators to educate them about what charter schools are and what they will mean for the Mississippi education system.

“Charter schools can provide a high-quality public option that can outweigh the outdated traditions and community norms that have enabled segregation. Charter Schools are free to be more innovative and are held more accountable for improved student achievement.”

-Charter Schools: A Choice to Integrate, Angela Bass, 5/21/2014

Improving *the Legislation*

Our current advocacy agenda includes enabling charter schools to enroll students across district lines, permitting charter school applications in “C” school districts without permission of the local school board, and allowing charter school teachers to participate in the public retirement system.

Supporting *the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board*

In order to facilitate high-quality implementation of the new law, Mississippi First provides resources and support to the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. Over the past year, we recommended candidates for appointment to the new Authorizer Board and gave intensive feedback to the Board as they wrote and adopted their first charter school application. We also provided recommendations on the process of hiring for their new executive director and hosted their intern.

Sponsoring *the Mississippi Charter Schools Association*

MSF serves as the fiscal sponsor for the Mississippi Charter Schools Association (MCSA), which supports charter school applicants as well as approved charter schools. MCSA recently received its 501c3 status and is preparing to spin off.

12

12 schools applied in the first round of charter school applications. 1 was granted a charter in June 2014.

14

Mississippi's charter school law was ranked #14 in the nation by National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in 2014. This was a 29-spot jump from 2013.

7

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board is made up of 7 appointees.



Learn
more
www.mississippifirst.org

Common Core

2010

In 2010, the Mississippi State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards as Mississippi's new academic standards in mathematics and English Language Arts.

TODAY

Mississippi First is a leading advocate for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Mississippi. We believe the standards describe what our students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful in our economy. We are dedicated to raising public awareness of the importance of supporting the standards and to dispelling myths.



CommonCoreMS.org

Mississippi First provides CCSS resources and advocacy tools for members of the public to take action and support the implementation of the CCSS in Mississippi.



Social Media Campaign

To spread awareness of the CCSS and reach a wide audience, MSF launched the *Choose Excellence* social media campaign. Followers receive regular information pertaining to the standards and their implementation. We also use paid advertising to promote a series of pro-Common Core ads geared towards parents.

“For Mississippi to be first, we must raise our learning standards to match those of leading states across the country. The standards bring our students to a higher level than we have ever had before in Mississippi.” **-MSF Responds to Gov. Phil Bryant’s statement on Common Core, 6/20/2014**

3

Myth of the Month

In order to help dispel myths and spread facts about the CCSS, we publish a “Myth of the Month” to CommonCoreMS.org. In the past, we have covered topics such as the difference between curriculum and standards as well as data collection and rights to privacy.

4

CommonCoreMS Newsletter

To inform the public on the implementation of Common Core in Mississippi, we distribute a monthly e-newsletter.

5

Show your support!

We drafted a sign-on letter for business leaders to show their support for the CCSS. We also provided an opportunity for the general public to show their support through the *Take Action* feature on the CommonCoreMS website.

6

Common Ground for Common Core

In the fall of 2014, Mississippi First hosted an advocacy event to spread awareness and garner support of the CCSS among undergraduate college students and young adults.



Learn **more**
CommonCoreMs.org



CHOOSE EXCELLENCE
CommonCoreMS

Sex Education

2011

In March of 2011, the Mississippi Legislature passed House Bill 999, requiring **every school district** to adopt a sexuality education policy (“abstinence-only” or “abstinence-plus”) and a corresponding curriculum approved by the Mississippi Department of Education.

The Creating Healthy and Responsible Teens (CHART) Initiative was created by Mississippi First in partnership with the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) with support from the Women’s Foundation of Mississippi.

The *Goals* of CHART

1

Increase responsible decision-making

2

Improve teen sexual health

3

Reduce teen pregnancy

TODAY

28

School districts across Mississippi participate in CHART.

CHART abstinence-plus programs address the needs of all students – those that are waiting, those that may not wait, and those that did not wait.

“In the midst of our planning, the 2011 Mississippi Legislature passed HB999, a law that, though seriously flawed, required that school districts implement sex education for the first time. The one benefit the law provided is that it forced school districts to take action...We still have a long way to go. We want all school districts, whether or not they ever adopt CHART, to teach only evidenced based–programs.”

- *The Truth about Peppermint Pattie: The Real Story of Sex Ed in Mississippi*, 4/4/2014

Launched the MYCouncil

The Mississippi Youth Council (MYCouncil), in partnership with Advocates for Youth, is made up of 10 students from around Mississippi. MYCouncil raises awareness among youth about the need for STI and pregnancy prevention efforts for themselves and other young people in Mississippi and advocates for comprehensive sex education in Mississippi public schools and other policy priorities.

Mississippi Became a Wise State

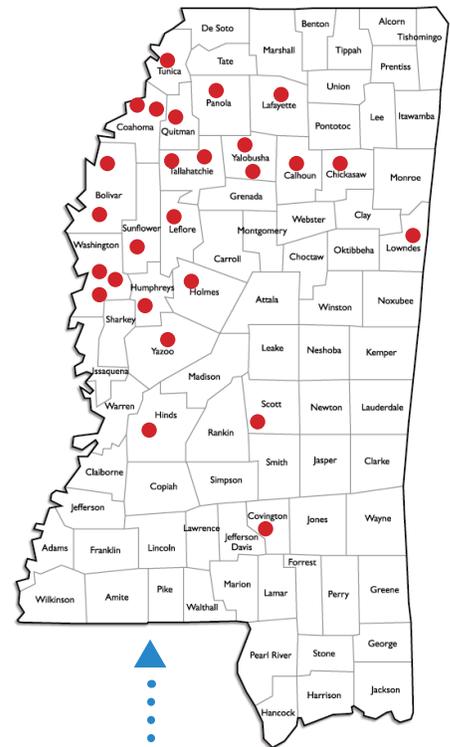
The WISE Initiative was launched in 2009 as a way to provide funding, partnership development, and best practices to states focused on providing Comprehensive Sex Education. Mississippi joins 9 other states currently active with the WISE Initiative.

Hired a Teen Health Policy Coordinator

In January, Mississippi First hired Josh McCawley as our Teen Health Policy Coordinator. Josh provides issue education and advocacy for local- and state-level policies related to teen sexual health. He is responsible for MYCouncil and assists in district advocacy for CHART and teacher training on the CHART curricula.

SIECUS Released new Sex Education Report about Mississippi

SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) released a new report titled, *Sexuality in Education in Mississippi: Progress in the Magnolia State*. The report highlights the work of CHART after the passage of House Bill 999 during the 2011 legislative session.



Staff & Board



Rachel Canter
Executive Director

Rachel's responsibilities involve direct interaction with all interested stakeholders, donors, legislators, and other policymakers. She works with the Board of Directors to ensure MSF is functioning according to our mission and goals and operating within our budget and funding restrictions. Rachel also oversees all policy research and advocacy initiatives.



Angela Bass
Deputy Director of Policy

Angela serves as an education policy expert, assisting MSF in enacting its policy agenda. She is responsible for analyzing policy and data, developing policy proposals, conducting advocacy activities directed toward policymakers, leading research projects, writing policy papers, and delivering policy presentations.



Sanford Johnson
Deputy Director of Advocacy

Sanford directs all MSF's community-level policy outreach and advocacy efforts. He leads the advocacy campaign for the CHART Initiative and Common Core and spearheads our campus outreach. Sanford engages educators, students, parents, and community members through presentations, trainings, and project facilitation.



MacKenzie Stroh
Director of Communications

MacKenzie is responsible for promoting, enhancing, and protecting MSF's brand reputation as well as a broad range of public relations activities relative to the strategic direction and positioning of the organization and its advocacy agenda. This includes newsletters and other print publications; web, e-news, and other online communications; media and public relations; and marketing.



Josh McCawley
Teen Health Policy Coordinator

Josh provides issue education and advocacy for local- and state-level policies related to teen sexual health. He works directly with the Deputy Director of Advocacy to assist in district advocacy for the CHART Abstinence-Plus Policy and teacher training on the CHART curricula. He also works with local communities to improve teens' access to general health services.

Board of Directors

Matt Bengloff, *Interim Board Chair*
Project Director, Race to the Top
Cleveland, MS
Term: FY2014-FY2016

Maggie Middleton, *Board Member*
Attorney
Native of Lula, MS
Term: FY2012; FY2013-FY2015

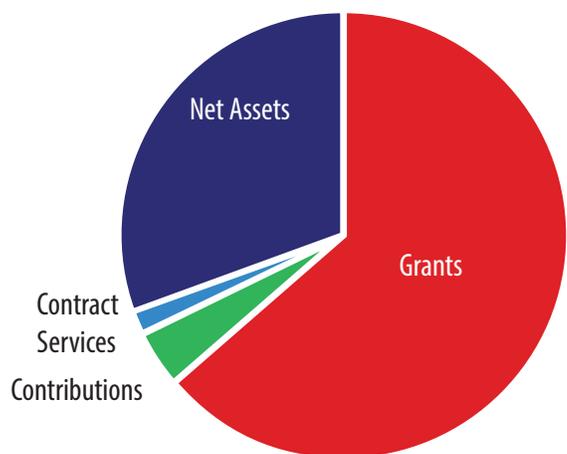
Marty Wiseman, *Board Member*
Retired Executive Director of the John C. Stennis Institute of Government & Community Development
Starkville, MS
Term: FY2012; FY2013-FY2015

Mary Thompson, *Board Member*
Retired Educator
Clarksdale, MS
Term: FY2012; FY2013-FY2015

Finance

The numbers below reflect our revenue and expenses from July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014.

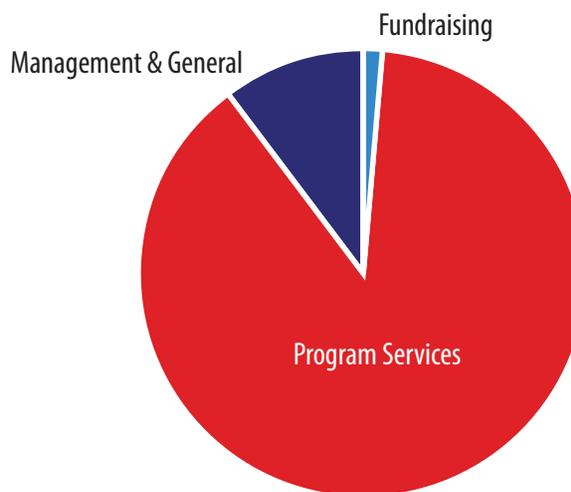
REVENUE FY 2014



Grants \$921,477
 Contributions \$57,783
 Contract Services \$25,432
 Net Assets Released from Restrictions \$439,621

TOTAL REVENUE \$1,004,692

EXPENSES FY 2014



Fundraising \$7,274
 Program Services \$404,930
 Management & General \$46,637

TOTAL EXPENSES \$458,839

Supporters

Thanks to our generous donors and sponsors, MSF is able to reach many of our goals to directly impact education reform in the state of Mississippi. Many individuals, businesses, and organizations have supported MSF this year through grants and donations. We couldn't have done it without you!

Advocates for Youth

AmazonSmile

Lydia Baldwin

Angela and Kevin Bass

Melissa Bass

Matt Bengloff

Sarah Blackburn

Bouncer Foundation, Inc.

Lilith & George Burner Foundation

Andrew and Rachel Canter

Wade Chambers

Greg Claus

Committee for Economic Development

Lowrey Crews

Mike Debbeler

Nicole Dooley

Tristan Durst

Michelle Garraway

Amanda Gatlin

Susan Glisson

The Grove Foundation

Mary Hardy

Brett and Elizabeth Harris

Michael and Debra Hicks

Gary Hines

MacKenzie Stroh Hines

Landon Howell

R C Johnson

Terrence Johnson

W C and Everlyn Johnson

Kellogg Foundation

Terri Lane

Lee Ann Mayo

Joshua McCawley

Phelton Moss

Joe Osgoode & Ron Nurnberg

Abby Olivier

Emry Oxford

Kevin and Stephanie Parkinson

Policy Innovators in Education

Julius Rainey

Katie Rarick

Imran Rehmani

Kiara Roberts

Holly Smith

Danny Spreitler

State Summit Partners

Mary Alex Street

Melanie Tucker

Penny Wallin

Walton Family Foundation

Amie Whittington

Stay Connected

Mississippi First uses social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to connect with friends, policy makers, donors, and the community. We also send out a monthly e-newsletter with sneak peeks, policy positions, and information on all that is new and inspiring at Mississippi First. Connect with us and stay on top of all we have to offer.

The year of Facebook

www.facebook.com/mississippifirst



We increased our Facebook followers by over 13,000 likes.

We ran 3 Common Core Facebook campaigns.

We have 1,142 followers on Twitter.

We have tweeted 2,534 times.

Tweet that!

www.twitter.com/Mississippi1st



In March 2014, we relaunched the Mississippi First website.

Search for MSF publications, blog posts, policy platforms.

Reinventing the MSF website

www.mississippifirst.org

Support Us!

Our organization's foundational belief is that broken public policy has historically impeded progress in Mississippi. Your support helps us serve Mississippi's children and families through our work with communities and policy makers. Our current issues include charter schools, preK, teen health, and the support of high educational standards. Please partner with us to advance for transformative policy solutions that ensure educational excellence for every Mississippi child.

Donate Today!

You can donate today at www.mississippifirst.org, mail your gift to P.O. Box 1159, Jackson, MS 39215, or call our Executive Director at 601.398.9008 for more information on how you can make a difference at Mississippi First.



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