



COMMISSION

ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI
CREATE FOUNDATION

Celebrating

25
YEARS

1995 - 2020

BUILDING REGIONAL
UNITY AND COOPERATION
IN
NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI

The Commission on the Future of Northeast Mississippi was established in 1995. Its purpose is to strengthen regional unity and cooperation by engaging in community development. For the past 25 years, the Commission has addressed several major regional community development issues.

Some of the more notable areas of interest are discussed below.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Thousands of people in the region have completed leadership development classes through the Covey Institute's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Leadership program.

DEVELOPMENT TEAMWORK

Local, regional, and statewide developers engage in meaningful dialogue and networking during quarterly roundtables hosted by the Commission. Although the Commission does not engage in economic development projects, it provided financial support through the CREATE Marchbanks Fund to the regional tourism initiative that evolved as Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area. Finally, the chief executive officers of Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi formed the MSU-UM Task Force on Regional Development to assist our Commission in addressing development and education issues. One result was the publication of resources available at each university that can be utilized by local and regional developers.

BROADBAND ACCESS

Many rural areas in our region are losing population, which can result in devastating economic consequences. Access to broadband can make a difference in reducing population loss and improving the lives of thousands of people. After the Commission studied this situation, MEGAPOP was established almost twenty years ago to provide better access to the internet. In early 2019, the Mississippi Legislature passed a bill that would allow rural electric cooperatives to offer high-speed internet service to their customers. This effort was led by Northern District Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley and endorsed by CREATE's Commission.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION

CREATE and its Commission have supported a local Mission Mississippi chapter in Tupelo for 16 years. In addition, the Commission invited former Governor William Winter to make a major speech at one of our State of the Region meetings on the continuing need for racial reconciliation.



EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

High quality early childhood programs are essential to proper development of youngsters, ages birth to five. Since these programs are not readily available in our region, we have provided moral and financial support (primarily through CREATE's Marchbanks Fund) to initiatives designed to improve the quality and availability of early childhood programs, including Baby Steps in Okolona, Excel by 5, Mississippi Building Blocks, and several early childhood centers in Lee County. The Commission also hosted an Early Childhood Summit and supports an expansion of the state's early childhood collaborative initiative.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Initial efforts were focused on dropout prevention. The North Mississippi Media Alliance (organized by the Commission) and Three Rivers Planning and Development District ran two media campaigns to reach the general public to encourage dropout prevention and recovery. This initiative originated in the Commission.

Marchbanks grants to ICC and NEMCC led to innovative approaches to increase the number of GED graduates. These initiatives resulted in a huge percentage increase in GED graduates, which led the state legislature to provide \$3 million statewide annually for the state's 15 community colleges to lead dropout recovery efforts.

A Tuition Guarantee Program in northeast Mississippi was planned and coordinated by the Commission. Over the past decade, more than 15,000 high school graduates have benefited from having their tuition guaranteed for two years to one of four community colleges serving our region.

The Commission was the main advocate for passage of Districts of Innovation legislation, which enables school districts, with state approval, to develop and implement innovative plans for all or part of their districts. Baldwyn, Booneville, Corinth, Oxford, and Tupelo have received this designation from the State Board of Education.

Dropout prevention summits were sponsored by the Commission for twelve years to assist school districts in addressing the dropout issue. High school dropouts have been reduced by 50% over the past decade.



UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi were presented with data and asked to help our region achieve better education and economic results. The university CEO's enlisted their top administrators and formed the MSU-UM Task Force on Regional Development. In addition to providing a directory of services to our development community, they developed a reverse articulation agreement and a unique teacher education scholarship program. The agreement allows a former community college student to automatically receive his or her associate's degree after entering a state university and completing the remaining courses needed to qualify for the community college degree. The MSU College of Education and UM School of Education developed and implemented the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Scholarship Program, which is a full-ride scholarship for more than 40 new university students each year. This program requires each graduate to teach in Mississippi for a five-year period. It is attracting high quality students from throughout the nation. This program is funded by the Herrin Foundation.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

The Commission continues to support the completion of four-lane construction on more than 150 miles of high priority highways in our region.

LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

The Commission staff is making presentations in local communities to inform them of their current economic, demographic, and social status. Several communities are evaluating the data and forming task forces to address some of the key issues revealed by the data they received from the Commission.



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