



An Open Letter to the Citizens of Mississippi:

Tomorrow, as the sun rises over Mississippi, nearly half a million children will walk through the doors of public schools from Biloxi to Southaven. Many will arrive on unsafe buses to enter outdated classrooms with too few computers and textbooks, and too little lab equipment. Their schools will lack sufficient funds to pay enough teachers to meet student needs, resulting in fewer course offerings than in other states. And a shortage of basic supplies will mean that some teachers must reach into their own pockets to handle the shortfall. The scene will be commonplace.

Twelve years from tomorrow, Mississippi's current classes of kindergartners will be preparing for life after high school. Their parents will hope that the public education their children received will take them to college or technical school or into a well-paying job. Anticipation will be prevalent.

Amid this contrast between the present state of our public schools and the dreams for our children's future is a decision that will soon rest with each one of us. On Nov. 3, Mississippi arrives at an historic crossroad. In one direction lies a highway to fully funded, better equipped and stronger public schools. In the opposite direction is a trail to the same dead-end that has kept our state from reaching its full potential, educationally and economically.

Initiative 42 is the proposed constitutional amendment to require the Mississippi Legislature to abide by its own K-12 funding law known as the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP). Last year, nearly 200,000 Mississippians – friends and neighbors, Republicans and Democrats, business people and educators, parents and pastors – signed petitions to place Initiative 42 on the ballot. In doing so, we forged a commitment to improve our children's future.

MAEP was adopted by the Legislature in 1997 to provide our schools with adequate funding for a 21st century education. And yet, the Legislature has adhered to its own law just twice in those 18 years. The result is that Mississippi's public schools have been underfunded by \$1.7 billion. This election year we can set public education on a new course.

After careful consideration and review of the facts, we believe that fully funding MAEP through Initiative 42 is Mississippi's best opportunity to improve our public schools. And it will not require state budgets to be cut or taxes to be raised. Better schools mean better jobs, higher wages for Mississippians and more economic growth.

As we move forward, let us remember that we are all Mississippians with a deep love for our state and a commitment to our children's future. Now is the moment – not tomorrow or twelve years from tomorrow – to finally say to our public school students, ***"Your education is our first priority."***

Jarrius Adams, *Student*

Wynn Alexander, *Businessman*

Tim Alford, *Physician*

Claiborne & Marian Barksdale, *Public School Parents*

Jim Barksdale, *Businessman*

Mike & Camie Bianco, *Baseball Coach and Public School Parents*

Robin Boswell, *Public School Parent*

Sam Bounds, *Former Superintendent*

Lundy Brantley, *Superintendent*

Thomas Brown, Sr., *Clergy*

Reginald Buckley, *Clergy*

Malcolm Butler, *Professional Football Player*

Joseph Campbell, *Clergy*

George Carlson, *Former Supreme Court Justice*

Susan Chiarito, *Physician*

Alton Cobb, *Physician and Former State Health Officer*

Tommy Cobb, *Physician*

David Cole, *Former Community College President*

Debra Dace, *Superintendent*

Shannon Eubanks, *Principal*

Billy Joe Ferguson, *Superintendent*

John Grisham, *Author*

Joyce Helmick, *Former Educator*

Isiac Jackson, *Clergy*

William "Bill" Jones, *Former State Board of Education Chairman*

John Jordan, *Former State Superintendent*

Jim Keith, *School Board Attorney*

Robert Khayat, *Former University Chancellor*

Gearl Loden, *Superintendent*

Sissy Lynn, *Parent of the Year*

Joe May, *Clergy*

Charles McLaurin, *Civil Rights Leader*

Joyce McNair, *Former Superintendent*

Ray Morgigno, *Superintendent*

Anna Morris, *Teacher of the Year*

Sondra Odom, *School Board President*

Gayle Parker, *Circuit Clerk*

Tom Pittman, *Former Newspaper Publisher*

Brandon Presley, *Public Service Commissioner*

Jack Reed, Jr., *Businessman*

CJ Rhodes, *Clergy*

Harold Roberts, *Clergy*

Jason Shelton, *Mayor*

Adrian Shipman, *Citizen of the Year*

Errick Simmons, *City Council Member*

Dwalia South, *Physician*

Leeson Taylor, II, *Superintendent*

Mike Waldrop, *Former Superintendent*

Hollis Watkins, *Civil Rights Leader*

Dolphus Weary, *Community and Religious Leader*

Lamar Weems, *Physician*

William Winter, *Former Governor*

On November 3, please vote FOR Initiative 42.

PAID FOR BY BETTER SCHOOLS, BETTER JOBS

www.42forbetterschools.org