

High quality of life grows children ready for learning.

Families will be STRONGER

Conditions for children will IMPROVE

Children will be READY to enter kindergarten

3rd grade students will be PROFICIENT in reading

7th grade students will be PROFICIENT in math

ACT scores will REACH the SE average

Good schools and quality training grow a skilled workforce.

Teachers will be HIGHLY QUALIFIED

Schools will be HIGHLY RATED and meet AYP

Schools will be SAFE

Students will GRADUATE from high school

Workers without diplomas will OBTAIN GEDs

Non-traditional age students will ENROLL in college

A skilled workforce grows a strong, diversified economy.

Benchmarks for Accountability and Decision-Making

CYCLE OF PROSPERITY

Citizens will be HEALTHY

Home ownership will INCREASE

Public safety will be ENHANCED

Minority income will ACHIEVE parity

Income will APPROACH the US average

Counties will GROW their economies

A strong economy grows the capacity for high quality of life.

Businesses will DO WELL

Workers will earn HIGH wages

Workers will be EMPLOYED in productive jobs

The region will TRAIN skilled workers

Higher education levels will be ATTAINED

Students will COMPLETE college

BACKGROUND

The Commission on the Future of East Mississippi and West Alabama asked the Regional Academy to develop Cycle of Prosperity Benchmarks for Accountability and Decision-Making for the multi-county region served by the Commission.

An elite professional team was gathered by The Montgomery Institute to develop the Benchmarks:

- Dr. Henry Johnson, the new State Superintendent of Education for Mississippi helped lead the effort to develop accountability standards in North Carolina.
- Pete Walley, director of the Long Range Economic Planning Bureau of the Education Research Center in Mississippi monitors economic and workforce trends for the state.
- Dr. Charles Harrison, director of the Advanced Education Center of the University of Mississippi in Tupelo, was superintendent of a level 5 rated school district and leads a new education improvement initiative called Accountability Plus.
- Dr. Bo Beaulieu, director of the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University, promotes development in rural areas in 13 southern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

- Dr. Elizabeth Burns, associate professor of Educational Leadership at Mississippi State University in Meridian, is co-director of the Educational Policy Fellowship Program for Mississippi.

The team sought benchmarks that, if achieved, will accelerate the region's education and workforce upward on the Cycle of Prosperity.

Twenty-four benchmarks, most with clear indicators, were developed and presented to the Commission. The Commission formally adopted them on March 17, 2003.

Guiding principles included:

- Effectiveness requires rigor and relevance.
- Accountability requires measurement and benchmarks.
- Improving effectiveness and accountability requires relevant data that is readily understood.
- Understanding the data provides a basis for developing an improvement plan.
- Monitoring data periodically allows us to see if we are improving on the benchmarks.

BENCHMARK INDICATORS

- Children will be **READY** to enter kindergarten.
Indicated by kindergarten entrance assessments.
Indicated by participation in pre-school and Head Start programs.
- 3rd grade students will be **PROFICIENT** in reading.
Indicated by standardized test scores.
- 7th grade students will be **PROFICIENT** in math.
Indicated by standardized test scores.
- ACT scores will **REACH** the Southeastern average.
Indicated by ACT scores.
- Teachers will be **HIGHLY QUALIFIED**.
Indicated by teacher licensure and NCLB requirements.
Indicated by trends in the number of National Board Certified Teachers.
- Schools will be **HIGHLY RATED** and meet AYP (annual yearly progress).
Indicated by state and national performance standards.
- Schools will be **SAFE**.
Indicated by NCLB reports and state school safety audits.
- Students will **GRADUATE** from high school.
Indicated by graduation rates.
- Workers without diplomas will **OBTAIN** GEDs.
Indicated by GED statistics.
- Non-traditional students will **ENROLL** in college.
Indicated by college enrollment data.
- Students will **COMPLETE** college.
Indicated by community college and university graduation rates.
- Higher education levels will be **ATTAINED**.
Indicated by Census educational attainment trends.
- The region will **TRAIN** skilled workers.
Indicated by vocational school production.
Indicated by community college workforce training statistics.
- Indicated by Workforce Investment Board data.
- Workers will be **EMPLOYED** in productive jobs.
Indicated by employment trends in selected high skill industry sectors and in goods producing industries.
- Workers will **EARN** high wages.
Indicated by Bureau of Economic Analysis wage trends.
- Businesses will **DO WELL**.
Indicated by business birth and death trends.
- Counties will **GROW** their economies.
Indicated by growth trends in employment and wages.
- Income will **APPROACH** the United States average.
Indicated by trends in the ratio of local per capita income to the national average.
- Minority incomes will **ACHIEVE** parity.
Indicated by the comparison of minority per capita income to average per capita income.
- Public safety will be **ENHANCED**.
Indicated by trends in homicides and crime rates.
- Home ownership will **INCREASE**.
Indicated by Census owner-occupied dwelling trends.
- Citizens will be **HEALTHY**.
Indicated by trends in selected health statistics.
Indicated by infant mortality rates.
Indicated by increased enrollments in CHIP.
- Families will be **STRONGER**.
Indicated by trends in divorces.
Indicated by teen pregnancy rate trends.
Indicated by increasing numbers of children in two-parent families.
Indicated by births to unwed mothers trends.
- Conditions for children will **IMPROVE**.
Indicated by decreasing trends in percent of children living in poverty.
Indicated by improving trends in low birth weight babies.
Indicated by child abuse data.