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**REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI, THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE,
AND MISSISSIPPI BOARD OF EDUCATION BY THE COMMISSION ON
STARKVILLE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT STRUCTURE**

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 2013 Legislative Session, the Legislature passed and the Governor approved House Bill 716 consolidating Starkville School District and Oktibbeha County School District with the consolidation becoming effective on July 1, 2015. House Bill 716 also established the Commission on Starkville Consolidated School District Structure ("Commission"). The Commission is composed of seven (7) members representing the Starkville School District, Oktibbeha County School District, Mississippi State University, and the Mississippi Department of Education. The members are:

Dr. Larry Drawdy, Chairman, designee of Dr. Lynn J. House, former Interim State Superintendent of Education;

Dr. Bill Welch, Alternate, designee of Dr. Lynn J. House, former Interim State Superintendent of Education;

Dr. David Shaw, representative of Mississippi State University appointed by the President of Mississippi State University;

Three (3) representatives of the Starkville School District appointed by the Board of Trustees of the Starkville School District and who may be members of the board or the Superintendent of Schools -

Dr. Lewis Holloway, Superintendent,

Mr. Rex Buffington, Parent and

Dr. Lee Brand, Board Member;

Two (2) representatives of the Oktibbeha County School District, one of which is the school district conservator and the other a member appointed by the State Superintendent.

Dr. Margie Pulley, Conservator, Oktibbeha County School District; and

Mr. Orlando Trainer, a resident of the Oktibbeha County School District appointed by the former Interim State Superintendent of Education.

The responsibility given to the Commission by the Legislature was to review the current structure of the districts in Starkville, Mississippi and in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi and make recommendations on future actions of the provision and transition of services of the newly consolidated school district in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency with which it is delivered.

II. MISSION STATEMENT

The Commission adopted the following Mission Statement:

To make recommendations to the 2014 regular session of the Legislature as to the best possible plan for expanding the Starkville School District to include students and schools from the Oktibbeha County School District, and thereby to:

- (a) Improve the quality of education by
 - providing the best opportunity for every child in the community to learn and develop with excellence being the goal and
 - identifying and enlisting all partners who can help achieve this goal; and
- (b) Improve efficiency to maximize available resources; and
- (c) Achieve a successful consolidation of districts that can serve as a model for others in Mississippi.

III. MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission met on the following dates in 2013: May 15, June 6, July 16, August 22, September 5, September 18, October 3, October 22, October 29, November 6, November 7, November 21, December 10, and December 23. Copies of the minutes are **available upon request made to the Mississippi Department of Education**. On August 22, 2013, the Commission held a public hearing where approximately two hundred (200) interested citizens attended. A copy of the transcript is attached to this report as Exhibit "A." A copy of the list of individuals who signed in attendance is attached to this report as Exhibit "B." A copy of the list of individuals who spoke at the public hearing is attached to this report as Exhibit "C." The comments of the public at the hearing on September 5, 2013 include the following: (1) that the public desired the Commission to proceed with a sense of urgency, (2) that the districts should have been consolidation earlier, (3) that the Oktibbeha County students could be successful, and (4) the public desired consolidation be a model for other consolidations in the state. A second public hearing was held on November 7, 2013. A **summary** of that transcript is attached to this report as Exhibit "D." A twitter town hall was conducted by the Parents for Public Schools on the evening of November 5, 2013 with 28,000 followers. A **summary** of that transcript is attached to this report as Exhibit "E." Another twitter town

hall meeting was held on December 17, 2013. A summary of that transcript is attached to this report as Exhibit "F." On 12/19/13, citizens from the Education Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools met to discuss the consolidation. Commission members present were Dr. David Shaw, Mr. Rex Buffington, Mr. Orlando Trainer, and Dr. Margie Pulley. A copy of the recommendations is attached as Exhibit "G."

IV. CHARGE FROM THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE

The Legislature required the Commission to develop a report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the State Board of Education on or before March 1, 2014, with recommendations to accomplish the following:

(a) Review the current structure of school districts and the location of schools in Starkville, Mississippi, and Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, and recommend how they can be consolidated into one (1) school district in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency at which it is delivered,

(b) Review the capital facility needs of both school districts and recommend methods of financing necessary improvements, including the possibility of pledging Mississippi Adequate Education Program funds for capital improvement purposes,

The Commission does not recommend the use of MAEP funds for capital improvement purposes.

(c) Detail in the report how best to implement consolidation and make any other recommendations on how to maximize education quality in Starkville and Oktibbeha County while eliminating duplicative and wasteful administrative spending, and

(d) The Commission shall also be authorized to recommend that portions of the Oktibbeha County School District be merged into districts in adjoining counties.

A. RECOMMEND THE METHOD TO CONSOLIDATE THE SCHOOLS IN STARKVILLE AND OKTIBEHHA COUNTY INTO ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO IMPROVE BOTH THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND EFFICIENCY AT WHICH IT IS DELIVERED

The Legislature charged the Commission with the responsibility of reviewing the current structure of school districts and the location of schools in Starkville, Mississippi, and Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, and recommend how they can be consolidated into one (1) school district in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency at which it is delivered. Dr. Holloway and Dr. Pulley reported that several educational services between the districts had already been consolidated, such as Vocational Education classes, Alternative Education, **advance placement, ROTC, and Special Education.**

The following charts document statistical data regarding every school in the Oktibbeha County School District and the Starkville School District.

Oktribbeha County School District 106 West Main Street Starkville, MS 39759														
District/Schools	Grades	Grade Population									Enrollment	QDI	Performance Rating	Growth
District	N/A										856	136	C	Yes
		Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	SPED Self-Contained				
East Oktribbeha Elementary	Pre-K – 6	20	50	38	45	44	44	39	32		317	138	C	Yes
West Oktribbeha Elementary	Pre-K – 6	20	26	23	32	29	27	13	27		197	173	B	Yes
				7	8	9	10	11	12					
East Oktribbeha High	7 – 12			37	32	45	36	40	22		212	113	D	Yes
West Oktribbeha High	7-12			25	14	26	22	20	18		130	138	C	Yes

Starkville School District 401 Greensboro Street Starkville, MS 39759														
District/Schools	Grades	Grade Population									Enrollment	QDI	Performance Rating	Growth
District	N/A										3198	155	C	Yes
			K	1	2									
Sudduth Elementary School			365	381	338									
						3	4	SPED Self-Contained						
Ward-Stewart School							362	345	*	714	170	B	Yes	
								5						
Henderson Intermediate School								345	*	351	164	C	Yes	
					6	7	8							
Armstrong Middle School					311	296	346	*		963	146	D	No	
				9	10	11	12	*		1170				
Starkville High School				281	346	278	252	*			157	C	Yes	

*Numbers are masked to prevent the identification of students.

All schools in the Starkville School District are located within a two-mile radius in the City of Starkville. West Oktribbeha County Elementary School is located in Sturgis,

Mississippi (the southwest corner of Oktibbeha County). West Oktibbeha County High School is located in Maben, Mississippi (the northwest corner of Oktibbeha County). East Oktibbeha County Elementary School is located in Starkville, Mississippi (the northeast corner of Oktibbeha County). East Oktibbeha County High School is located in Crawford, Mississippi (the southeast corner of Oktibbeha County). A map depicting the location of the schools is attached as Exhibit "H." A map depicting the location of the residences of the students enrolled in the two school districts is attached as Exhibit "I."

PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF STARKVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT AND THE OKTIBBEHA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The commission has agreed by consensus to the following plan for the consolidation of Starkville School District and The Oktibbeha School District into one (1) School district in order to improve both the quality of education and the efficiency at which delivered for all students.

A. Education of Students in the Starkville/Oktibbeha Consolidated School District (July 1, 2015)

1. All public school students who reside in the Starkville and Oktibbeha County School Districts will be educated by the Starkville Consolidated School District.

B. Structure of Elementary Schools (July 1, 2015)

2. West Oktibbeha Elementary School will remain a Pre-K through Grade 6 elementary school **but the location will change from Sturgis, Mississippi to the West Oktibbeha High School building in Maben, Mississippi** in the Starkville Consolidated School District. **The school zone for West Oktibbeha Elementary School will remain the same.**
3. **East** Oktibbeha Elementary School will remain a Pre-K through Grade 6 elementary school at the same location in the Starkville Consolidated School District. The school zone for **East** Oktibbeha Elementary School will remain the same.
4. As a result of East Oktibbeha Elementary School and West Oktibbeha Elementary School remaining Pre-K through Grade 6 schools at the same locations **with the exception of West Oktibbeha Elementary School moving to Maben, Mississippi**, the following elementary schools in Starkville will remain at the same location and serve the same grades in the Starkville Consolidated School District:
 - Sudduth Elementary (Grades K-2);
 - Ward-Stewart Elementary (Grades 3-4); and
 - Henderson Elementary (Grade 5).

The school zones for Sudduth Elementary, Ward-Steward Elementary and Henderson Elementary will remain the same.

C. Structure of Middle Schools (July 1, 2015)

5. All 7th and 8th grade students in Starkville and Oktibbeha County School Districts will attend Armstrong Middle School.
 - Sixth Grade Students in the Starkville School District will attend Overstreet Elementary.
 - The Alternative School located at Overstreet Elementary will move to an alternate site.

D. Structure of High School (July 1, 2015)

6. Students in Grades 9-12 at East Oktibbeha High School and West Oktibbeha High School will attend Starkville High School.

E. Long Term Plan

7. Long Term Plan – (July 1, 2016 or July 1, 2017 or future date, if funding is made available by the State Legislature, local ad valorem taxes or other funds.)

Need further clarification of Plan A (6th and 7th grades).

Plan A – (July 1, 2017)

- Build an 8th and 9th grade school. (See pages 9 & 10 for specifically 6th and 7th grades.)
 - Cost approximately \$14M
- Reassign the 9th grade from the Starkville High School.
- All 6th and 7th graders in the Starkville Consolidated School District will attend Armstrong Middle School.

Plan B – (July 1, 2016)

- Build 16 classrooms at Armstrong Middle School to provide classrooms for all 7th and 8th grade students in the Starkville Consolidated School District.
- Cost approximately \$3,069,000.00.

(Plan B is not the preferred plan to provide the best educational opportunities for students and could be initiated **only** if there is a lack of funding for Plan A.)

F. Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms

8. Increase the number of four-year-old Pre-Kindergarten classrooms in the Starkville Consolidated School District. (Currently, Starkville School District has two (2) four-year-old Pre-Kindergarten classes. Currently, Oktibbeha County School District has one (1) four-year-old Pre-Kindergarten class at East

Oktibbeha Elementary and one (1) four-year old class at West Oktibbeha Elementary.)

B. REVIEW CAPITAL FACILITY NEEDS AND RECOMMEND METHODS OF FINANCING NECESSARY IMPROVEMENTS

The Mississippi Legislature charged the Commission with reviewing the capital facility needs of both school districts and recommend methods of financing necessary improvements, including the possibility of pledging Mississippi Adequate Education Program funds for capital improvement purposes.

1. Facility Needs:

A. Oktibbeha County School District

Gary Shafer reviewed facilities for the Oktibbeha County School District and suggested renovations at a minimum of \$1.5 million up to \$5 million to include upgrades on air, heat, plumbing and roof. This amount does not address all issues. (See architect's report as Exhibit "J.")

B. Starkville School District

The Superintendent of Starkville School District reviewed facilities for the Starkville School District and suggested renovations in the amount of \$_____.

2. Pledging MAEP funds

Mr. Todd Ivey, Director of the Office of Educational Accountability at the Mississippi Department of Education, provided his opinion on the issue of pledging Mississippi Adequate Education Program funds for capital improvement purposes in a memorandum dated August 20, 2013. A copy of this memorandum is attached as Exhibit "K." Mr. Ivey provided the following to the Commission:

If the Commission decides to recommend pledging MAEP funds to finance capital improvement projects, it must be pointed out that MAEP funds are provided to local school districts to meet operational needs of the district, e.g., pay salaries of district employees, help offset transportation cost, provide funding to help offset utilities cost, etc. In the event that a portion of MAEP funds are redirected to service debt, it will require the district to search for ways to offset the reduced amount of MAEP funds available for operations. This will be accomplished through reducing operational expenditures, increasing local ad valorem dollars for operations, or a combination of the two.

The Commission does not recommend the use of MAEP funds for capital improvement purposes.

3. 3-mil note

The Oktibbeha County School District Conservator will issue up to a 15-year 3-mil note levy to fund repairs to the Oktibbeha County School District's two elementary schools to bring them equivalent to Starkville elementary schools. The 3-mil note would raise approximately \$1.5 million.

4. Legislative authority to issue a reverse referendum for a general obligation bond.

Issuing bonds through an **Oktibbeha County School District reverse referendum** is one necessary method of local funding. *A reverse referendum is a means in which the governing body (Oktibbeha County) may pass a direct resolution to issue bonds for funding capital improvement projects. The measure allows for a waiting period in which citizens may petition the body for a public referendum. If no petition is filed, the measure may stand without passage of a public referendum.* The Mississippi Legislature has precedent for extending authority to execute reverse referendums for specific time periods and purposes.

The Commission recommends that the Legislature extend this authority to Oktibbeha County School District within the 2014 Legislative session, effective July 1, 2014, so that the Oktibbeha County School District may take advantage of this available means of generating local funds for education and begin the process of upgrading County facilities and resources in preparation for consolidation in July 2015.

C. BEST METHOD TO IMPLEMENT CONSOLIDATION AND MAKE ANY OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO MAXIMIZE EDUCATION QUALITY

The Mississippi Legislature charged the Commission to detail in the report how best to implement consolidation and make any other recommendations on how to maximize education quality in Starkville and Oktibbeha County while eliminating duplicative and wasteful administrative spending.

The Transition Plan for the Consolidation for the 2014-2015 School Year will be conducted by the administrations of both school districts:

1. The administrators will consolidate programs, including but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Athletic programs and student organizations
 - b. Bus routes
 - c. Curriculum consistent with Common Core State Standards
 - d. Districts' business offices and financial accounting software
 - e. Federal programs
 - f. Food service
 - g. Safety crisis plan
 - h. Special education programs

2. Oktibbeha County School District students in grades 9-12 will be offered courses in Starkville available during first block on space-available basis or at times agreed upon by the two districts.
3. The consolidated school district will dispose of property not needed for school purposes as allowed by state law (Sections 37-7-451, et seq.) to include boys and girls clubs, community centers, Head Starts, etc.

D. AUTHORITY TO RECOMMEND THAT PORTIONS OF THE OKTIBBEHA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT BE MERGED INTO DISTRICTS IN ADJOINING COUNTIES

In House Bill 716, 2013 Legislative Session, the Legislature authorized the Commission to recommend that portions of the Oktibbeha County School District be merged into districts in adjoining counties. On September 5, 2013, superintendents and/or board members from the districts adjoining Oktibbeha County appeared before the Commission to respond to the following questions:

1. Is your school district interested in absorbing Oktibbeha County School District students K-12 (some or all students)?
2. Does your school district have individual capacity to absorb some or all students of the Oktibbeha County School District?
3. Do you have adequate transportation capacity to absorb some or all students of Oktibbeha County School District?
4. Where are your individual schools located in relationship to Oktibbeha County?
5. Would your district be willing to negotiate a per pupil amount in lieu of ad valorem revenue?

The responses of the school representatives are attached as Exhibit "L."

At the end of the meeting, it was the consensus of the Commission that students residing in Starkville and Oktibbeha County would be educated by the Starkville Consolidated School District. Therefore, the Commission does not recommend that any portion of the Oktibbeha County School district be merged into districts in adjoining counties.

V. MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

- **It is recommended that the Consolidated District capitalize on its proximity to Mississippi State University in developing a Partnership School District.** The Partnership District will rely on three elements:
 1. **Expand MSU collaboration with the Consolidated District in all existing buildings/schools.** Expand existing relationships to strengthen collaboration

on teacher education including field experiences; develop and demonstrate new and innovative teaching methods; develop partnerships to test curriculum, examine assessment outcomes, understand student behavior and engagement; support student academic achievement in a variety of disciplines and increasing use of technology; support remediation and tutoring including after-school and summer programs; and continue and develop other projects that build from the strengths of both parties.

2. **Develop a joint new Middle School for Sixth and Seventh Grade as a new partnership school.** The school will be operated by and integrated with the Consolidated District. This will be a true partnership with the Consolidated District and MSU, with shared responsibility for curriculum, programming, teacher professional development, etc. It will capitalize on a new facility designed specifically for the purpose of a partnership/demonstration school, with observation rooms and research space. It will be located on the MSU campus, but easily accessible to the community and Consolidated District staff, administrators, and students.
 3. **Develop a new MSU Research and Outreach Center on Rural Education.** The center will engage in research on teacher education in rural areas, unique issues of rural education, teacher recruitment for rural areas, using technology to support teaching and learning in rural areas. The College of Education and other colleges and research centers at MSU will participate. STEM education will be a primary focus, specifically looking at effective instruction for low-income/rural/minority students. No such center exists in the southern U.S., and only four exist nationally.
- **It is recommended that funding be provided to MSU and the Consolidated District to develop the Sixth/Seventh Grade Partnership School on the MSU campus.** The school will include with research and professional development spaces and equipment (e.g., observation rooms) and will have a STEM-based curriculum. Total funding estimated for the new facility is \$17M. MSU will take responsibility for raising, through private gifts and grants, a total of \$7M, requiring state funding of \$10M.
 - **It is recommended that the Consolidated District capitalize on the existing strength of on-campus programs in the College of Education and the School of Human Sciences to expand high-quality Pre-K programs to all children in the city and county.** This will involve:
 1. **Expand MSU's Pre-K program.** MSU will partner with the Consolidated District to expand an accredited program for three- and four-year-olds to create an exemplary model pre-K program, including children with disabilities. The year-round program will be based on the Mississippi Early Learning Standards (which prepare children for readiness for a Common Core based Kindergarten program) and will be developed around the standards of the National Association for Education of Young Children standards for developmentally appropriate early childhood education. In addition to serving

children and families in the county the program will provide field experiences for teacher education students in the College of Education and the School of Human Sciences.

2. **Expand MSU's Infant and Toddler program.** Similarly, existing zero- to two-year-old program will be enhanced by increasing capacity for enrollment. The infant and toddler program will be based on NAEYC standards for early childhood programs and the state of Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines that provide guidance for developmentally appropriate, play-based learning and development environment for infants and toddlers. The program will provide field experiences for pre-service teachers in the School of Human Sciences.
 3. **Expand outreach to other centers in the county, and throughout the state.** This program will support pre-K programs throughout Oktibbeha County to help move those programs toward accreditation and increasing implementation of the state's Early Learning Standards. In addition to supporting existing pre-K programs in the county, the outreach center will also create opportunities for internships, exchanges with centers and Pre-K programs around the state, building on existing outreach programs in our various programs.
 4. **Enhance outreach programs to families.** This program will build on programs already underway through MSU and the Consolidated District to reach out to families in Oktibbeha County around early childhood, learning, and parenting. It will collaborate with family studies students in Human Sciences. The focus will be on parenting skills, helping students learn, physical fitness, health and nutrition.
- **It is recommended that funding be provided to MSU to develop the pre-K program on the MSU campus.** Total funding estimated for the new early childhood facility is \$14 million. MSU will take responsibility for raising, through private gifts and grants, a total of \$6M, sufficient to cover costs of the infant and toddler program and research and outreach facilities, requiring state funding of \$8M for the pre-K portion of the facility. Ongoing funding to sustain the program will be provided by a combination of dedicated state funding, tuition, grants, private donations, and university support.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. That 2016 expiring term board member remain in place until January 2017. In November of 2016, an election will be held for a board member who resides outside of the incorporated municipal limits in the manner prescribed in Section 37-7-203. The elected board member would take office for a five (5) year term beginning January 1, 2017.

2. **To amend Mississippi Code 37-7-104.3 (House Bill 716) as follows:** For the initial three (3) years following the administrative consolidation required by this section, the State Department of Education shall grant a waiver of accountability and state assessment requirement to the Starkville Consolidated School District ~~for the student population enrolled therein from the former Oktibbeha County School District when determining the new consolidated school district accreditation level on the performance and accountability-rating model.~~
3. **Statutory authority be given to** Oktibbeha County School District **to contribute** funds to improvements of Starkville buildings to accommodate Oktibbeha County School District students, e.g., expansion of Starkville High cafeteria and renovations necessary to permit occupation of Overstreet School.
4. Statutory authority be given to Oktibbeha County School District Conservator to seek a reverse bond referendum to provide Oktibbeha County School District means to finance **up to** \$10 million to assist in **upgrading** Oktibbeha County School District buildings and to create more equitable tax burdens between the two school districts.
5. The Oktibbeha County School District Conservator will issue **up to a** 15-year 3-mil note levy to fund repairs to Oktibbeha County School District's two elementary schools.
6. Designate the Starkville Consolidated School District as a demonstration school district that will, in partnership with Mississippi State University, establish best practices in education that will be shared with other districts throughout the state to strengthen educational achievement of all pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students in Mississippi. **See MS Code Ann. Section 37-131-15 as Exhibit "M."**
7. **New 6-7 Grade School or 7-8 Grade School:** Provide up to \$10 million in funding to the Starkville Consolidated School District and Mississippi State University for construction of a new **6-7 or** 7-8 grade school to achieve a successful consolidation. The new school will include facilities and equipment that will be used by the Mississippi State University to prepare students, teachers and administrators to become change agents in education throughout Mississippi.

8. **Pre-Kindergarten Program:** Provide up to \$10 million for construction and \$1 million annually in operating costs for five years to Mississippi State University and the Starkville Consolidated School District for establishment and operation of a quality pre-kindergarten program for all four year olds in Oktibbeha County. The pre-kindergarten program will be created as a demonstration project with a goal of expanding pre-kindergarten in other counties throughout the state, ultimately achieving universal availability of quality pre-kindergarten education for all four-year-olds in Mississippi by 2025.
9. Increase debt limit cap to 20% of countywide assess valuation with the inclusion of the reverse referendum option when pursuing issuance of General Obligation Bonds.
10. To fund legal fees for private counsel and/or AG office in assisting the two school districts with desegregation cases.

The above recommendations by the Commission are specific only to the consolidation of Starkville School District and Oktibbeha County School District and do not apply to other districts in the State. This consolidation is a unique situation involving the Starkville School District and the Oktibbeha County School District and involves a distinct partnership with Mississippi State University. This partnership is not found in any public school and university setting in the State of Mississippi. The Legislature may consider some of these recommendations for future consolidations.

VII. SUBMISSION OF THE PLAN TO THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI, EASTERN DIVISION

Section 37-7-104.3 of the Miss. Code (House Bill 716, 2013 Legislature Session) provides that all administrative consolidations under this section shall be accomplished so as not to delay or in any manner negatively affect the desegregation of another school district in the county pursuant to court order.

Both Starkville School District and Oktibbeha County School District are under Consent Decrees in desegregation cases in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi, Eastern Division. This Report of the Commission on Starkville Consolidated School District Structure will be submitted to the United States District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi, Eastern Division.

APPROVED BY **CONSENSUS BY** THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON STARKVILLE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT STRUCTURE:

Dr. Larry Drawdy

Date

Dr. David Shaw

Date

Dr. Lewis Holloway

Date

Dr. Margie Pulley

Date

Mr. Orlando Trainer

Date

Mr. Rex Buffington

Date

Dr. Lee Brand

Date