

# Better Together

## What is the Commission?

The Better Together Commission is an independent group appointed by Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant, Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Jackson Public Schools on Nov. 2, 2017, to chart a new path toward transformational change in the Jackson Public School district. Its collective work, informed by sound research and voices from all sectors, is to create and implement a bold strategy to bolster educational outcomes.

The challenges facing the Jackson Public School district are complex and no single entity can solve them alone. They call for a different approach, one deeply-rooted in community collaboration and a commitment to work together more effectively to ensure all children in the Jackson Public School district have opportunities to succeed in school and in life.

## Who makes up the Commission?

The Commission is comprised of 15 diverse volunteer leaders who come from a variety of experiences and backgrounds with a demonstrated commitment to improving the City of Jackson and the Jackson Public School district. They include government, education, business, faith and philanthropy leaders as well as parents and teachers and were identified by the governor, mayor and Kellogg Foundation.



## The Commission's Charge

The Commission's charge is to lead efforts to create a bold new vision for educational transformation in the Jackson Public School District. Cooperative Planning, intelligent study and engaged community are our values. The Commission will:

- Dramatically expand engagement efforts in the community by partnering with local citizens, area organizations and institutions, local and national education leaders and experts;
- Expand knowledge and understanding of the unique problems we are trying to solve by leading a comprehensive, child-centered report detailing the current state of the education ecosystem, and identifying assets and gaps with specific recommendations on what is needed to create conditions for all children to thrive.

The Commission will meet monthly to exchange information, provide updates and generally assure its charge is met. The meetings will be open to the public.



**Dr. Ivye L. Allen** is President of the Foundation for the Mid South, a regional foundation serving Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The Foundation funds programs and initiatives that focus on community development, education, health and wellness, and wealth building. Since its inception in 1990, the Foundation has leveraged more than \$750 million to the region.

Ivye's prior work experience includes serving as Chief Operating Officer for MDC Inc. and Director of Fellowship Programs for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Before working in the nonprofit arena, Ivye's early experience was in finance and marketing positions in fortune 100 corporations.

Her education includes a Ph.D. in social policy from Columbia University; a M.S. in Urban Affairs from Hunter College; a M.B.A. in marketing and international business from New York University; and a bachelor's in economics from Howard University. She serves on numerous board and advisory groups and is a member of several professional and social organizations.



**Claiborne Barksdale** is the former CEO of the Barksdale Reading Institute. Under his leadership, BRI began the principal pilot program in 2010 and supported the creation of Mississippi Building Blocks.

Prior to his work at BRI, Barksdale practiced law in Jackson, Miss., worked for US Senator Thad Cochran in Washington, D.C., served as associate general counsel for BellSouth Cellular Corporation in Atlanta, and clerked on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, La. Claiborne also taught English for one year in a public high school in Jackson.

He is the past president of the Board of the Mississippi Children's Museum, chairman of The Parents' Campaign, a public advocacy project in Mississippi, and serves on the advisory board of Mississippi Building Blocks, a pre-K initiative in Mississippi.



**Dr. Robert Blaine** serves as the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for the City of Jackson. In his role as CAO, Blaine manages an organization of over 2,200 employees and a budget in excess of 350 million dollars. He has arrived at this position through a background in academic administration.

Dr. Blaine has long been interested in the intersection between leadership, art, teaching and technology. His role as conductor of Tougaloo College's *ConneXions* and Jackson State University's CyberLearning initiatives provided direction for the development of 21st century learning environments for students and faculty.

Dr. Robert Blaine holds a bachelors degree from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, a Master's degree from The Catholic University of America and a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. Blaine is an Apple Distinguished Educator, TEDx presenter and an endorsing artist of the C. G. Conn Company.



**Geraldine Chaney, MD, FAAP:** Dr. Geraldine Chaney is a pediatrician in the Jackson metropolitan area where she has practiced for over 30 years. She is owner of Capital City Children and Adolescent, PLLC and is a board certified pediatrician and Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She has served as Chief of Pediatrics for Central Mississippi Medical Center and St. Dominic Hospital.

Other duties include serving as assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics for the University of Mississippi Medical Center, past member of the Mississippi State Board of Health and a four year appointment to the National Advisory Council of the National Health Service Corporation. Her awards include Physician of the Year, Distinguished Service to the Field of Medicine Award, and Director's Award from the National Health Service Corps and Best Doctors of America Award for years 2002 through 2010.



**Cheryl Coleman** is a native of Jackson Mississippi. She is a graduate of Provine High. Coleman attended Jackson State University where she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and a Master of Arts in Teaching.

She has two children, LaSondra and Zedrick, that are also graduates of JPS (Murrah). Coleman has been employed for Jackson Public Schools for 25 years. Cheryl is currently a Math Teacher at Bailey APAC Middle School, where she embraces the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change that you want to see in the world."

Coleman also believed if students are to be successful it has to start with her. Despite the challenges in our society today, Cheryl still has faith in, "ALL children can learn ."



**Ronnie C. Crudup, Sr.**, is the Administrative Bishop for the Fellowship of International Churches. He is also Senior Pastor of New Horizon Church International, a congregation of over 3,000 members in Jackson, Mississippi, which he founded in 1987.

Bishop Crudup earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Jackson State University and a Master of Divinity degree from Reformed Theological Seminary.

He is the Founder and President of New Horizon Ministries, Inc., a non-profit organization that operates five community-based programs throughout the City of Jackson, the We Make It Better Foundation, Co-founder of the Mississippi Faith-Based Coalition for Community Renewal Inc., a Statewide Housing Nonprofit, and Founder and CEO of All Citizens for Mississippi PAC.

Bishop Crudup serves as Co-Chairman of Working Together Jackson, and as a board member of Merit Health Central, The Hope Enterprise Corporation, Muni-Strategies, and non-profit organization called Telos.



**Dr. Kathleen Grigsby** was born of two deaf parents and is a native of Louisiana. She has lived in many parts of the country as well as Australia. Her father was a theatre actor and her mother is originally from Australia. She attended many schools, however, she graduated from the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board in Louisiana. In 1994, she attended The University of Mississippi and graduated with a Bachelor of Education in Elementary Education. A year later, she received her Masters of Education at The University of Mississippi. In 2004, she attended Mississippi College and obtained her Education Specialist degree in Administration. In January 2008, she became a part of the first cohort at Mississippi College's Doctoral program. In 2011, she was the first person to graduate from Mississippi College with a Doctorate in Administration. She is currently the principal at Davis Magnet World IB Elementary School.



**Dr. Shauna Nicholson-Johnson**, a native of Jackson, MS, currently serves as the Principal at Baker Elementary School in the Jackson Public School District. She is a 1995 graduate of Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, MS, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. She has pursued additional studies at Jackson State University, Jackson, MS where she earned a Doctorate Degree in Elementary and Early Childhood Education, a Specialist Degree in Education Administration and Supervision, and a Masters of Arts in Teaching.

Dr. Nicholson-Johnson has extensive administrative experience. She has served as an Elementary School Teacher, Curriculum/ Instructional Specialist, and an Intervention Specialist for the Jackson Public School District.

Dr. Nicholson-Johnson, a certified administrator, has provided training for administrators at the PREPS Conference (Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools) in Choctaw, Mississippi. In addition, she has provided training nationally at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference in Anaheim, California.



**Charles McClelland** was elected to serve as Chair of the Mississippi Board of Education in 2010. Mr. McClelland graduated from Alcorn State University in 1964 and later earned a Master's of Education from Jackson State University.

Although he is currently the owner and CEO of McClelland Moving and Storage, Inc. in Jackson, most of McClelland's career has been in public education. He has worked as a teacher and principal at several schools throughout Mississippi.

From 1981 to 1994, Mr. McClelland worked in the Rankin County School District, serving as an assistant superintendent and principal of Northwest Rankin Attendance Center. Mr. McClelland was inducted into Alcorn State University's Hall of Honor and the University's Sports Hall of Fame for basketball. He has served on the State Executive Board of the Mississippi High School Activities Association and on the District 6 Board of Directors for that Association.



**Paheadra Bratton Robinson** is a native of Jackson and currently serves as the Mississippi Partnership Specialist with the U S Census Bureau. She is a graduate of Lanier High School, earned a B.A. In Political Science from Tougaloo College and a Juris Doctorate from the University Of Mississippi School Of Law.

Paheadra formerly worked as a public interest attorney where she led statewide reform efforts of the predatory lending industry, mortgage foreclosure prevention programs and advocated for financial protection for consumers. She has also served as a staff attorney for the Mississippi House of Representatives, was the co-founder of a nonprofit serving families in crisis, as well as managed a robust private practice.

As a result of her efforts to reform the payday lending industry, she was selected as the national recipient of the Florence Kelly Consumer Leadership Award. Paheadra is the proud mother of three children in Jackson Public Schools: Kameron, Kristopher and Khloe.



**Yumeka Burt Rushing** is a program officer at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan. She is based in the Mississippi office and provides leadership and oversight for on-the-ground execution of programming efforts by evaluating grant proposals, conducting background research, preparation of funding documents, grant monitoring, driving community connections and providing grantee technical assistance.

Rushing earned a Juris Doctor at the Cumberland School of Law, Samford University; a master's degree in publishing from Pace University in New York City; a bachelor's in English from Spelman College; and has also studied at the University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England.

The Kellogg Foundation is headquartered in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special emphasis is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. Mississippi represents a priority place for WKKF. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).



**Dr. Laurie Smith** currently serves as Education and Workforce Development Policy Advisor to Gov. Phil Bryant and Executive Director of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council. Prior to joining Gov. Bryant's staff, she served as Executive Director of a privately funded early childhood research project with the University of Mississippi.

Dr. Smith has also worked with the Mississippi Board of Trustees at IHL, where she served in the Commissioner's Office. Additionally, Dr. Smith worked 10 years at Mississippi State University in the College of Education and then as part of the senior management team in the Office of President.

She has over 25 years of experience in research, education, workforce development and teaching. She is a graduate of University of Arizona, Western New Mexico University, and received her Ph.D. from Mississippi State University.



**Ed Sivak** is an Executive Vice President with the Hope Enterprise Corporation. As an officer, Sivak manages the strategic direction and implementation of HOPE's public policy and communications activity. Prior to joining HOPE's executive leadership team, Sivak was the founding Director of the Mississippi Economic Policy Center, an initiative of HOPE. During his tenure at MEPC, he supervised the research and writing of numerous publications on the state budget, issues affecting working poor families and high-cost lending. He also has educated the public through guest lectures and presentations and was frequently called upon by both local and national media to address policy issues affecting the state. His work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, MarketWatch, the Clarion Ledger, Mississippi Public Broadcasting and the Mississippi Business Journal.



**Leland R Speed** is a native of Jackson and attended Jackson Public Schools. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Management from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and was awarded the Master's Degree in Business Administration by the Harvard Business School.

Leland Speed is a pioneer in the REIT (real estate investment trust) industry, beginning his career in 1978 when the industry was constituted primarily of mortgage REIT's. With his vision, he founded Parkway Properties and EastGroup Properties, making them among the first public equity REIT's that launched the "modern REIT" era. Mr. Speed has served as past Chairman, President and CEO of EastGroup Properties and Parkway Properties (both publicly traded and listed on the New York Stock Exchange).

In 2004 Speed was named by Governor Haley Barbour as the Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority, the state's lead economic development agency. He returned to the MDA to serve as the interim director in 2011.



**Laketia Marshall-Thomas** is the Assistant Superintendent of Area 2 with the Jackson Public School District. A native of Bolton, Mississippi, she graduated salutatorian of Hinds County Agricultural High School. Mrs. Thomas received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Chemistry from Tougaloo College, pursued a Master of Science degree in Polymer Chemistry from Clark Atlanta University, and furthered her studies at Mississippi College receiving a Master of Science and an Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership.

Mrs. Thomas has served in leadership capacities at Provine High School, Lanier High School, and Blackburn Middle School. She was selected as the High School Division's Administrator of the Year for two years. She led student participation in Jackson State University's statewide S.T.E.M. Team Competition at both Lanier and Provine High Schools - winning first place, both years of participation. The Jackson City Council awarded her the Amos Wright Award for community involvement and superior academic performance and the Outstanding Leadership in Education Award.

\* Ex-officio members to be announced.