

Statement on HB1170

Furloughing Teachers and Reducing Instructional Days

**Excerpt from Monday Memo to Local Superintendents
Dr. Tom Burnham, State Superintendent of Education
March 8, 2010**

We sincerely appreciate the Mississippi Legislature for its efforts in finding funding solutions to help restore \$37 million to K-12 education. It is extremely important that schools have the resources necessary to provide our boys and girls with the best education possible so they will have the greatest opportunities in the future. It is equally important that our school districts utilize the resources available to protect the integrity of the classroom.

You and your school board members are making careful decisions to balance the resources available and the needs of the students. Some superintendents have requested the flexibility to furlough all employees on non-instructional days to reduce both personnel and operational expenses. I support you and school boards having this flexibility in the event of an extreme financial emergency.

However, I cannot support reducing the number of instructional days in any way. Research shows that the two most important factors in student achievement are the quality of the teacher in the classroom and quality time on task. We simply cannot shortchange our students on the number of days we provide them in the classroom.

We must maintain a very careful position in communicating support for reducing instructional time with students and cutting the school calendar. While the ability to furlough all employees on non-instructional days may be an important tool for some school districts to survive budget cuts, reducing the school calendar may be viewed as an opportunity to reduce education funding in future fiscal years.

Mississippi is at or near the bottom in a number of areas, including academic achievement and graduation rates. It is crucial that we take every step possible to change these facts. Reducing the number of instructional days would be a step back, not a step forward.

I appreciate all that you do on a daily basis to help protect the integrity of the schools under your care.

***Dr. Tom Burnham
State Superintendent of Education***