

## **FIRST-PERSON COLUMN**

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### **Shortening school year sends wrong message to children**

**By William H. Jones  
Chair, Mississippi Board of Education**

We expect more from our teachers and students than we have ever expected before. Over the past few years, the Mississippi Board of Education has ramped up the curriculum, revised the assessment system and adopted a new Mississippi Accountability System to reflect the increased rigor of the curriculum and the assessment system. We have done so because Mississippi's children are going to compete with children from other states and countries for college and career opportunities. If we expect more of our children today, they will be better prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

We are moving in the right direction. Now is not the time to take a detour on the progress we are making. We can not expect our teachers to teach more and our students to learn more in less time. Shortening the school year sends the wrong message to our children and gives them less opportunity to succeed this year and in the future. School is important and we as adults and policymakers should treat it that way.

There has been discussion in the Mississippi Legislature concerning shortening the school year as a way of dealing with the current budget crisis that our state is facing. At the same time, they have discussed not decreasing teacher salaries. However, reducing the number of school days without reducing salaries saves the state very little. Certainly, our teachers deserve to be paid more, but the only way to gain significant savings is to reduce spending on personnel.

The answer to the budget crisis rests not with reducing instructional days or reducing funding to education. Rebuilding our economy begins with investing in education. We must fully fund the Mississippi Adequate Education Program. We must give school leaders the resources they need to provide our students with the excellent education they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Just as our students are competing with students from other states and countries, Mississippi is competing with other states and countries for economic development opportunities. We can not attract business and industry to our state without preparing our children today to be the workforce of tomorrow.



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If Mississippi is to compete globally, we must think globally. While Mississippi and most American states require 180 days of instruction, international students receive an average of 193 school days per year. According to Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), students in Korea, Japan and China receive 225, 223 and 221 instructional days, respectively, in a school year.

We can not solve the budget crisis on the backs of our children. Shortening the school year is not an educationally sound decision and it is not a fiscally sound decision. Extraordinarily difficult times call for extraordinarily good judgment. Reducing instructional days is not a good idea for our students.

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