Today’s students not only must measure up to their hometown peers; they must also compete against students across the state, the country, and the world. Mississippi First is on a mission to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every child.

For the last eleven years, we have been leading a charge to make Mississippi first in education nationally, and we are finally seeing signs of success in the national data. As an organization, we value results, accountability, transparency, engagement, equity, non-partisanship, and collaboration.
Mississippi First is a nonprofit that works to improve pre-K-12 public education. We are the state’s foremost education policy organization.

We conduct and analyze research to inform our work, letting data and practice guide us to a nuanced understanding of problems and solutions. We are not driven by either ideology or partisanship.

We advocate for policies and programs that increase educational excellence for all Mississippi kids, according to our research. We work for change at both the state and district levels. Our current agenda includes state-funded pre-K, high-quality public charter schools, high educational standards, sensible testing policies, high-quality curriculum, and great teachers and leaders.

We communicate our work to the greater public and stakeholders. As experts in our field, we share our knowledge and insights through publications, presentations, and briefings.
The 2018-2019 year marked the beginning of a new decade at Mississippi First. We celebrated our tenth anniversary with friends and supporters at the Mississippi State Capitol and spun off Teen Health Mississippi on January 1, 2019. We also toasted Sanford Johnson, my Mississippi First co-founder, and Angela Bass, our Director of Policy, for their great contributions before they transitioned to new roles outside of Mississippi First. Sanford is continuing to work as an education advocate while Angela has started a new early childhood-focused nonprofit that we hope to work closely with going forward!

In the pages that follow, we describe our major successes of the last year in each of our main issue areas: **pre-K; charter schools; standards and testing; and educator pipeline research.** A few major highlights include developing a pre-K briefing book for statewide candidates and receiving a positive outcome in the Mississippi charter school lawsuit. We are also extremely pleased to report that Mississippi continues to climb in the national rankings, finally reaching the national average for reading in math in fourth grade. At last, we can say not only that Mississippi has improved faster than the rest of the nation but that we’ve sustained this faster improvement over multiple years!

With each passing year—and each new sign of success—our passion for increasing outcomes for Mississippi students grows. **We hope that you will**
consider supporting our work through a donation of any size. As a nonprofit, we rely on your support. We are ever grateful to our donors and supporters and are careful shepherds of your generosity. We want to extend a special thank you to each of our friends and partners who has contributed this year and in years past.

As always, we encourage you to follow us on social media and join our e-mail list, if you have not already, to remain updated. Enjoy our 2018-2019 annual report!

Sincerely,

Rachel Canter
Executive Director
Pre-K Champions
We worked closely with allies this year to lay groundwork for a campaign to improve the state’s funding of pre-K as well as to expand the program. This work included meeting with legislators and candidates for statewide office to build political will and knowledge about the program. We also met with over 80 pre-K providers to invest them in telling their stories in the upcoming campaign.

Advancing Authorizing
We worked closely with the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board to study their policies and procedures and recommend a path forward for deep changes, particularly with the Mississippi Performance Framework and the renewal process. The Board has a long way to go, but we hope to continue working with them so that their oversight processes will be as strong as their application process.

Educator Pipeline Research
We launched a three-year research project to understand how to increase the pipeline of diverse, highly effective teachers for low-income students. The project includes quantitative and qualitative data and analysis about the state’s educator workforce. As part of this project, we convened a Teacher Advisory Group of 12 teachers from across the state to review our research and provide feedback. We’re excited about where this project will lead!

Spin-off of Teen Health Mississippi
After six years operating as part of the Mississippi First team, we successfully spun off our teen health work into a standalone nonprofit, Teen Health Mississippi! Teen Health is continuing to grow and deepen their impact on youth across the state. You can follow their work at teenhealthms.org.

Learn more about how to support our work at MississippiFirst.org
A three-year fight ended successfully this year when the Mississippi Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of charter school funding in Mississippi. Since 2016, Mississippi First has been quarterbacking the efforts of advocates to defend the law, including arranging for defendant-interveners and providing support to the legal defense teams. This positive outcome means the 1,750-plus children receiving their public education from one of the (now) six public charter schools in Mississippi can continue to attend their chosen public school. The ruling also unequivocally affirms what Mississippi First has said all along: public education dollars belong to public school children for their public education. Charter schools in Mississippi are public schools, and funding charter schools is funding public schools.
This year, Mississippi First developed a definitive briefing book on state-funded pre-K in Mississippi. The original impetus for this book was to educate aspiring elected officials about the program and to encourage their support. Along with the book, Mississippi First offered briefings to candidates for the top state offices (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General) as well as the current chairs of legislative education committees. As a result of these briefings, all of the candidates added expansion of the state program to their platforms! We have also been able to use the book with legislative candidates and to give the book to other interested parties, such as potential donors and the media, to share the information more broadly.

The book's success has tempted us to think about additional briefing books on other topics, encouraged by the fact that one candidate's team told us they would love to have something like it for every issue. Currently, the book is not available online due in part to its size, so this publication is our best performing without any press. In 2020, we plan to decide how best to share the information with the public.
Since our inception, Mississippi First has been an excellent steward of its financial resources. From July 2018-June 2019, we invested over $1.8M in our initiatives at Mississippi First and Teen Health Mississippi.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Charter Schools</td>
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*Total $1,463,487

Mississippi First is truly grateful for the loyal support of our partners and friends. Thank you for helping us advance our mission to champion transformative policy solutions ensuring educational excellence for every Mississippi child.
STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR FUTURE

PRE-KINDERGARTEN
By 2021, at least 35% of children will be in full-time, no-cost, high-quality pre-K seats.

In 2020, we will fight to expand pre-K to new communities while ensuring quality and a fair per-pupil cost.

CURRICULUM
By 2022, MDE will reach an 80% adoption rate of the newly approved, high-quality math curricula as well as any English/language arts (ELA) curricula approved in Spring 2020.

In 2020, we will develop and execute a communications strategy that increases teachers’ support for the use of high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum, with a focus on the most recently adopted math curriculum list.

EDUCATOR PIPELINE
By 2021, Mississippi will increase the percentage of low-income students served by a highly effective teacher.

In 2020, we will finish our first phase of research and report findings from state qualitative and quantitative data.

CHARTER SCHOOLS
By 2023, Mississippi will have 15 approved schools in at least three low-performing areas, with capacity to serve 17,250. No charter schools will be below a “C” after 3 years.

In 2020, we will focus on improving authorizing through strong policymaking and on growing Mississippi’s charter community.
The Mississippi First team is a group of dedicated individuals who work tirelessly to promote the mission of Mississippi First.

Rachel Canter
Executive Director

MacKenzie Hines
Chief of Staff

Toren Ballard
Director of K-12 Policy

Toni Johnson
Policy Coordinator

LeKesha Perry, Board Chair
Brett Harris, Board Member
Catoria Martin, Board Member
Adam Smith, Board Member