



Promoting  
Prosperity  
in

# Mississippi

EDITED BY

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The Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University was created in 2015 to support the study of markets in order to provide a deeper understanding regarding the role of markets in creating widely shared prosperity.

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# Preface

What creates prosperity? Why are some states rich and others poor? Why does Mississippi consistently rank as one of the poorest states in the nation? Can anything be done to move Mississippi ‘out of last place’? These questions are often raised by our students and fellow Mississippians. This book addresses each of these questions by identifying areas in which Mississippi can improve its economic conditions.

In this book, we identify key areas for Mississippi economic policy reform. Twenty-one scholars, ten of which are from or work in Mississippi, have contributed original policy research. All twenty chapters were written specifically for Mississippi with a shared goal to promote prosperity in the state. While some of the chapters contain complex policy reforms, we have made every effort to present the concepts and ideas in a way that is understandable to the average citizen, the person who can benefit the most from this information.

The first three chapters of the text summarize the basic economic principles necessary to achieve economic prosperity. These three chapters present the principles behind the reforms proposed in the subsequent seventeen chapters. Each chapter was written independently and offers unique insight into different areas of state policy reform. While the topics covered range from tax reform, education reform, healthcare, corporate welfare, occupational licensing and business regulatory reform to criminal justice reform, and natural disaster recovery efforts, there is a clear unifying framework underlying the conclusions reached in each chapter. The theme throughout is that economic growth is best achieved through free market policies, policies which are based on limited government, lower regulations, lower taxes, minimal infringement on contracting and labor markets, secure private property rights, low subsidies, and privatization. Policy based on these principles allows Mississippians to have more rights and more choices in their lives.

We hope that readers come away with a better understanding of capitalism’s true potential to generate the long-run economic growth necessary to make Mississippi more prosperous, as well as ideas for policy reforms that could accomplish it in our lifetimes. This book illustrates that if Mississippi embraces economic freedom, the state will experience more entrepreneurship, increased business and capital formation, higher labor productivity and wages, and overall economic growth. Our main goal is to provide the scholarly, academic research that can inform state policy decisions and open a much needed dialogue on growth-oriented policy reform in Mississippi.

We focus on long-run policy improvements. Thus, the analysis is not an assessment of any particular administration or political party. Instead, this book can be thought of as a blueprint of possible economic reform proposals that use scientific evidence as a guiding principle. We emphasize that our unifying framework, which shapes the conclusions drawn in each chapter, is based on economic science, not politics. All authors address their respective topics by relying on academic research. Topics and policy conclusions were not based on any particular political agenda, political party, or political expediency. Instead, the authors relied on cold, hard facts and data with references to published academic literature to develop policy reform suggestions specific for Mississippi. In fact, many reforms suggested may not be politically possible.

The inspiration for this book came from *Unleashing Capitalism*, a series of books using economic logic to improve state policy in West Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. We owe thanks to more people

than we could possibly list. We are indebted to our colleagues and the Finance and Economics advisory board at Mississippi State University who helped review chapters and provide invaluable feedback. We thank Ken and Randy Kendrick, Earnest W. and Mary Ann Deavenport, and the Pure Water Foundation for the funding necessary to embark on a project of this magnitude. We also thank our friends and family for their support, and for putting up with the long working hours that went into conducting this research. Most importantly, we would like to thank the staff and supporters of the Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University for publishing this book. Without their support, this book would not have been possible.

Let's start promoting prosperity in Mississippi!

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# 13

## **School Choice: How To Unleash The Market In Education**

Brett Kittredge





# 13

## School Choice: How To Unleash The Market In Education

Brett Kittredge

More than six decades ago, Nobel-prize winning economist Milton Friedman first proposed the idea of giving parents the opportunity to use the public funds associated with their child's education to pay for private school, if they desired.<sup>1</sup> As he stated, "The way to bring back learning into the classroom; the way to make sure that schools are responsive to the needs of the children they have in their classroom is to give parents more power and more control over their own child's schooling."<sup>2</sup> Friedman's solution? The simple, yet life-altering voucher plan that would do just that.

It would take more than three decades before this idea became law anywhere in the United States<sup>3</sup>, but Friedman believed that by providing options to parents for the first time, all schools would now be competing on the same level, and district schools would be incentivized to increase student performance to ensure parents remain enrolled in their schools. For the first time, if parents were not happy, they could go somewhere else.

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1 See, Friedman (1955).

2 See, Friedman (1980).

3 The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was enacted and launched in 1990 is considered the nation's first modern private school choice program. It provides vouchers to low-income Milwaukee students.

Mississippi should follow the model put forth by Friedman over 60 years ago and open district schools to competition by empowering parents to direct the funding of their child's education to the setting that they believe is right for their child, whether that is public, private, charter, home school, or some combination of various educational services.

## **Choice is A Daily Part of American Lives**

Parents make countless choices every day. If a parent is not happy with his or her child's pediatrician, he or she can look elsewhere. This remains as true for patients who pay through a government funded program such as Medicaid or the state Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Once again, this option of choice applies to families receiving government assistance via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps, or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

In these two very important areas that will impact a child's health and well-being, the government has made the decision that families, even those receiving government assistance, can make their own choices for their own children. Not only that, it is then up to parents to decide if those choices are working out for their family with the freedom to shop around if they are displeased. Because doctors and grocery stores know families have options and are making these choices of their own free will, they must be responsive to families or risk losing their money and patronage. If one grocery store does not provide a family with the food options their child needs, they can go to the next grocery store. There are no district lines. There are no bureaucrats who need to approve your switch.

We generally love having choices, even if it is difficult to decide between more than 50 different types of breakfast cereal. Markets enable individuals to have choices, and through choice individuals are able to improve their lives as they see fit, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

But the one area of our lives where a government monopoly exists with rare opportunities to choose differently is education in the United States. For more than a century, most children have attended an assigned district school based on two factors that have little to do with ensuring a child receives the education he or she needs to be successful in their career and life.

For one, children are assigned a school based on the location of their parent's home. In most instances, a five-digit zip code that a child will never choose will be the determining factor in the quality of education a child receives. Additionally, children are assigned to a grade based on the year they were born – a practice grounded in the belief that all students of the same age progress at roughly the same pace. This model is designed for some imaginary “median child,” who holds high-achieving students back while leaving students who are struggling behind.

Despite the noble efforts of Milton Friedman starting in the 1950s to education reformers across the country today, America has stubbornly refused to allow citizens to choose when it comes to education

## **Learning From Other Countries**

More than 25 years ago, another nation was dealing with failing district schools and looking for solutions to improve academic outcomes. Parents in Sweden were unhappy and concerned about what the poor academic performances might mean for the nation's future. So Sweden took decisive action by adopting a universal voucher program in 1992. Under this program, every student receives a voucher for

a district school or private school, including religious schools and for-profit private schools, whichever the parents choose:

Independent schools, like the public schools, get a voucher payment for each child. They compete vigorously with one other because the money follows the child to the school of his or her choice. Schools must satisfy their customers, or lose them.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Swedes today enjoy a market-based approach to education where families are free to choose the school they like best. In regard to education, a family living in Sweden has more freedoms than a family living in the United States.

Not surprisingly, this program has resulted in a high level of satisfaction among parents and children. More than 4,500 miles away in Eastern Asia, South Korea also stands out as a model for a high-tech, free market approach to education. Private after-school tutoring academies called “Hagwons” are a \$17 billion market that have made teachers millionaires and turned the academic performance of the country around:

Hagwons, in this sense, are like professional sports teams, constantly on the prowl for top tutoring talent. The more highly-regarded the tutor – whose reputation is linked to how his or her students perform on standardized tests and whether they are accepted into top colleges – the more the hagwon can charge. Moreover, since students sign up for specific tutors, the better a tutor’s reputation, the more money that tutor makes.<sup>5</sup>

South Korea has adopted a model that rewards top-performing tutors with a limitless salary, capped only by their abilities. South Korea has now gone from a country that was mostly illiterate to one that ranks second on the Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA, a global test of academic excellence. Moreover, the nation’s high school graduation rate stands at 93 percent, far outpacing both Mississippi and the United States.

From a Scandinavian country in Northern Europe, to the East Asian country of South Korea, there are unique examples of market-based education that are providing options to families, letting schools innovate and compete, and helping to improve academic outcomes for students- and countries.

## The State of Education

Every nine seconds a student in America drops out of school, often rendering that young adult unemployable and relegating him or her to a life with few opportunities and necessary skills.<sup>6</sup> This has a real cost not just for one individual, but for his or her family and every taxpayer in the country.

Consider this: High school dropouts are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates. Additionally, among those who are employed, they will earn, on average, about \$8,000 a year less than high school graduates and \$26,500 less than college graduates.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, two-thirds of the prison population in state, local, and federal prisons are made up of high school dropouts. The nation could save as much as \$18.5 billion in annual crime-related costs if the high school male graduation rate increased by just five percent. If the number of dropouts was cut in half, the nation could save \$7.3 billion annually in Medicaid savings, \$12 billion in heart disease-related sav-

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4 See, Butler (2009).

5 See, Crotty (2013).

6 See, Lehr (2004).

7 See, Alliance For Excellent Education (2014).

ings, \$11.9 billion in obesity-related savings, \$6.4 billion in alcoholism-related savings, and \$8.9 billion in smoking-related savings.

On the other hand, increasing the graduation rate to 90 percent for one year would create more than 65,000 new jobs and boost the economy by nearly \$11 billion. And the graduation rate has been increasing over the past several years. Both Mississippi and the United States saw record high four-year graduation rates for the 2014-2015 school year of 78 and 83 percent, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

But what does this mean? More people are graduating from high school, but is the United States lowering the bar rather than improving academic performance? The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development recently reported that American students ranked 25th out of 72 countries when tested on topics in science.<sup>9</sup> A Pew Research study found that American students ranked 38th out of 71 countries when tested in math, reading, and science.<sup>10</sup>

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, which bills itself as the nation's report card, found that only 40 percent of fourth-graders, 33 percent of eighth-graders, and 25 percent of 12th-graders are "proficient" or "advanced" in math.<sup>11</sup>

Mississippi has seen some recent progress as it was the only state in the nation to show significant increases in both 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading in 2015 on the NAEP, which arguably offers the best apples-to-apples comparison for student performance across the country. However, Mississippi still generally falls among the bottom five states in all measures as the state performed significantly lower than the National public average in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and science.

In fact, *Education Week's* Quality Counts report rated Mississippi as having the worst education system in the country, ranking it 51<sup>st</sup> in educational quality in 2014; even putting Washington, D.C. ahead of the Magnolia State.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that something is not working and dramatic improvements need to be made. Indeed, the United States has much work to do to catch up with the rest of the world, and Mississippi has much work to do to catch up with the United States.

## Is Money The Issue?

When the debate about education woes arises, a large contingent is guaranteed to make one, popular argument: District schools need more money. Many claim that lack of funding is the root of all problems and if schools had more money the results would follow. Yet Mississippi and the United States have been throwing more money at the problem for more than four decades.

In Mississippi, more than 50 cents for every dollar collected in the state's general fund is spent on public education.<sup>13</sup> In 2015, the state spent over \$9,700 per student when including state, local, and federal dollars. This is an uptick from around \$8,000 just a few years prior and is part of a larger trend. Adjusted for inflation, spending on education in Mississippi has increased by 54 percent since 1992. This large increase occurred while student enrollment decreased by 3 percent and teacher salaries increased by only 2 percent.

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<sup>8</sup> See, National Center for Education Statistics (2017).

<sup>9</sup> See, Hunt (2016).

<sup>10</sup> See, Desilver (2017).

<sup>11</sup> See, The Nation's Report Card (2015).

<sup>12</sup> See, Education Week (2014).

<sup>13</sup> See, Legislative Budget Office (2016).

Similar increases have occurred nationwide. Going back to 1970, inflation-adjusted spending on education has increased by 192 percent. However, the scores for 17-year-olds on the Long-Term Trend NAEP Assessments have remained flat.<sup>14</sup> A 2016 report from the United States Department of Education showed that a School Improvement Grants (SIG) program over the past decade pumped \$7 billion into education with zero impact on student achievement.

Designed to help failing schools, the SIG provided no academic gains for the students it was intended to help, and failing schools that received multi-year grants ended with results that were no better than similar schools that did not participate in the program.<sup>15</sup> Only the federal government can spend \$7 billion with nothing to show for their effort. The country is spending considerably more while showing little in the way of academic progress.

## The Best Schools Are Often Off Limits

This, however, does not mean that no child is receiving a high quality education in a district school in Mississippi, or in the United States. Indeed, there are district schools throughout the country that rival the academic output of any in the world. Likewise, Mississippi has a share of district schools that regularly produce high ACT scores and graduation rates, a healthy number of national merit finalists, and generally do a good job at preparing their students for success in college and life.

Madison Central High School, in Madison, Mississippi, is one of those schools. Families are flocking to Madison. Over the past ten years, the city's population has increased by about 25 percent while the population for the state of Mississippi has been stagnant, and they are moving for good reason. In 2016, Madison Central had an average ACT score of 22.4, a full four points higher than the state average and almost two points above the national average.<sup>16</sup>

However, the city of Madison, like many other neighborhoods with highly successful district schools in the United States, has a high bar for access due to a cost of living that makes these desirable neighborhoods unattainable for many. Yes, these schools are “public” meaning a family does not pay tuition as they would at a private school. However, they pay in other ways, such as higher home costs and property taxes. Since students are assigned schools based on district lines, only those who live within the coveted districts have access.

If a family cannot afford to live in Madison, they may choose to live in nearby Ridgeland. Unfortunately, Ridgeland High School's ACT scores are three points less, on average, than those of Madison Central and their graduation rate trails Madison Central by almost 13 points. If that family is not in Ridgeland, they may be in Canton, another option just north of Madison. The graduation rate of Canton High School was a tragic 52 percent in 2015 and their average ACT score is a little over 14.

Only 18 miles separates Canton High School from Madison Central High. Just four miles separates Ridgeland High School and Madison Central High School. However, a student's education achievement will be radically different depending on which side of the line he or she lives.

The story in Madison County is not different than many other places in Mississippi or around the nation. High-performing free, district schools are available, but only for families who can afford to purchase real estate within the district lines. As education quality rises, so does demand to move into the right

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<sup>14</sup> See, Burke (2016).

<sup>15</sup> See, Smarick (2017).

<sup>16</sup> See, Madison County Business League (2017).



neighborhood, which increases housing costs. The estimated home value in Madison is \$238,000 compared to \$177,000 in Ridgeland and \$125,000 in Canton. Additionally, just six percent of Madison residents rent compared to 52 percent in Ridgeland and 37 percent in Canton. Housing costs are an indirect way of paying for higher quality education. The arbitrary lines that destine some children to success and others to failure serve as an invisible, but very real, wall between a good education and a poor education.

## What Options Are Currently Available

If a family in the United States is not satisfied with their assigned district school, they do have options besides moving to a different school district, but these options are not available to everyone or even most. These options include public charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, and homeschooling.

Charter schools are public schools that receive government funding but are given the flexibility to innovate while being held to a high academic standard. Like traditional district schools, they are open to all children (though that is often limited based on capacity and district lines), they do not charge tuition, and they do not have special entrance requirements.

Charter schools are approved by an authorizing entity, which in some instances may be the local school district, and are run by either non-profit or for-profit entities.<sup>17</sup> Each charter school has a “charter” that can be revoked by the authorizer after a certain period of time if that school is not producing the academic outcomes agreed upon. The authorizing board provides one level of accountability. Parents provide additional accountability. No family is assigned to a charter school; rather families must choose to enroll their children, or “opt-in,” and they can leave at any time.

Charter schools are relatively new in the United States. The first charter law passed in Minnesota in 1991 and City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota became the nation’s first charter school to open its doors the following year. After the first school, the charter school movement soon began to spread. Numerous states quickly followed Minnesota’s lead and by 2016, 44 states including Mississippi had approved charter schools on some level.

For the 2016-2017 school year, more than 6,900 charter schools are serving an estimated 3.1 million students. In a ten-year period, enrollment in charters has tripled from 1.2 million since the 2006-2007 school year.<sup>18</sup> Figure 13.1 illustrates this trend. The current numbers represent about 6 percent of total public school enrollment today.

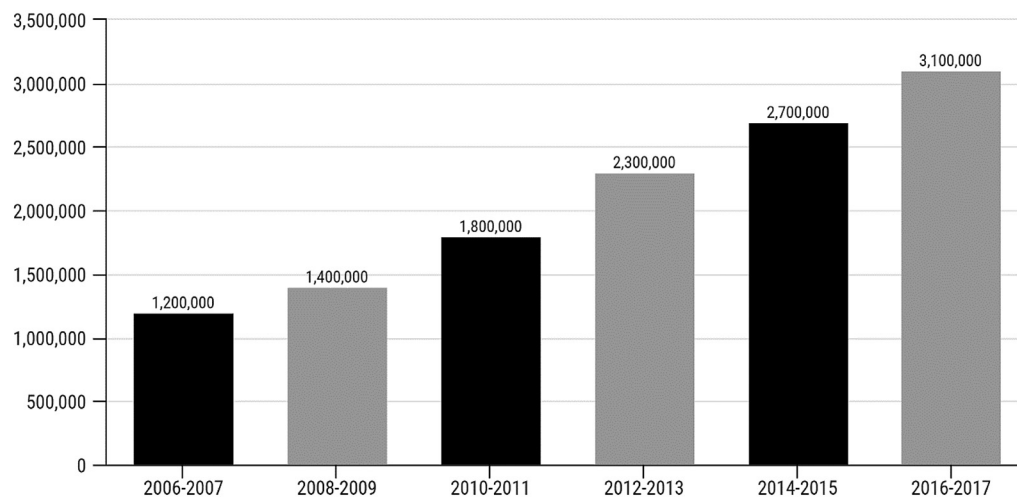
In many urban areas that have long suffered from having the worst district schools in the country, the charter movement has flourished. During the 2016-2017 school year, 17 districts across the country had 30 percent or more of “enrollment share,” the percentage of public school students attending a charter school,” with New Orleans being the nation’s first nearly all-charter district. Figure 13.2 list these 17 districts along with their share of enrollment.

However, charter schools are not readily available to every family who may wish to enroll their child. This may be due to either new laws, restrictive laws, or lack of school options and availability. That is certainly the case in Mississippi where the school districts in which a charter school can be located and the number of charter schools that can be authorized each year is limited.

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<sup>17</sup> In Mississippi, charter school operators must be non-profit.

<sup>18</sup> See, National Alliance For Public Charter Schools (2017).

**Figure 13.1: Charter school enrollment trends from 2006 through 2017**

Source: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Another option is magnet schools. Magnet schools are public schools run by the local school district, usually specializing in a field not found in a traditional district school. These schools are usually among the highest performing locally and nationally, but in many cases they are select admission public schools. This means, as opposed to charter schools (or district schools), a student needs to test-in to be admitted.

**Figure 13.2: School Districts with Large Charter School Enrollment Share**

School District	State	Charter School Enrollment Share
New Orleans	LA	92%
Detroit	MI	53%
Flint	MI	53%
District of Columbia	DC	45%
Gary	IN	43%
Kansas City	MO	40%
Camden	NJ	34%
Philadelphia	PA	32%
Indianapolis	IN	31%
Dayton	OH	31%
Cleveland	OH	31%
Grand Rapids	MI	31%
Victory Valley Union	CA	31%
San Antonio	TX	30%
Natomas Unified	CA	30%
Newark	NJ	30%
St. Louis	MO	30%

During the 2010-2011 school year, there were about 3,000 magnet schools in the United States, including 20 in Mississippi.<sup>19</sup> While magnet schools are an option for parents, they are run by a local school district and therefore do not apply any pressure on a school district to improve academic outcomes for their other students as there is no risk of lost revenue.

A third option is private schools, or non-public schools, which are privately funded schools that operate independently of the government. Private schools are funded by tuition and fees a child pays to attend the school, as well as private financial support. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were more

<sup>19</sup> See, National Center for Education Statistics (2012).

than 33,000 private schools in the country serving over 5.3 million students.<sup>20</sup> This is a decline from 6.3 million students in 2001, and estimates show enrollment is projected to decrease to 5.1 million by 2015.

The decline in private school enrollment is due to, in some part, competition from free charter schools, particularly in urban areas where charters are at their strongest. This has been particularly true for Catholic schools as their share of the private school market declined from 54.5 percent in 1989 to 41.3 percent in 2011.

Mississippi had 177 private schools in operation during the 2013-2014 school year. While there are instances of private schools in Mississippi that are donor funded and provide scholarships to every student, the tuition and fees necessary to run a school, which averages around \$5,300 per student but can reach \$10,000-\$15,000 at certain schools, often make private school cost prohibitive for many families.

Educating a child at home, either done by the parent or as part of a local co-op, is another educational option for parents. However, participation is also limited because of the costs associated with providing the education, since one parent will likely stay home.<sup>21</sup> Approximately 1.8 million students were homeschooled in the United States in 2012, an increase from 850,000 in 1999. As a result, the percentage of students who are homeschooled makes up 3.4 percent of school-age children across the nation.<sup>22</sup>

All of these choices in education provide options for some, but for the most part, they do not shake the market share of enrollment enjoyed by district schools. Charter schools have been successful in doing so in some cities, but even their impact is limited and localized. Private school and homeschooling, because of the costs associated with each, are also unable to match the market share of district schools, and therefore district schools receive little market pressure.

As a result, district schools have been able to enjoy an unparalleled government monopoly and have not had to improve their academic performances to please their consumers: parents.

## **What A Market Based Education System Would Look Like**

Putting parents firmly in control of their child's education and forcing all education sectors to compete for students will help improve and unleash the academic potential of American students.

There is no perfect system that has ever been designed that will always produce high quality results. Every child is different and with different needs comes the necessity to educate children in their unique learning style. The goal should not be a top-down approach that dictates one education model, but one that provides incentives to meet an individual's learning needs where schools are directly accountable to parents.

What programs might be shaped to provide universal school choice and options for every child? The most common type of school choice programs include vouchers, education savings accounts, and tax credit scholarships.

Vouchers direct money from the state to a private school of the parent's choice. There are currently 26 voucher programs available nationwide in 16 states, including two small programs in Mississippi for students with dyslexia and speech language therapy needs.<sup>23</sup> The programs in Mississippi mirror those

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<sup>20</sup> See, National Center for Education Statistics (2017).

<sup>21</sup> There have been several articles written about parents who work full-time and homeschool their child, but there is no data to determine just how many parents are doing this. See, for example, Laura Vanderkam, "How These Parents Work And Homeschool Too," Fast Company, January 2016, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3055528/how-these-parents-work-and-homeschool-too>

<sup>22</sup> See, National Center for Education Statistics (2016).

of many other states in that they are limited in reach and eligibility. Just two voucher programs, the John McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities in Florida and the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program, have more than 30,000 students enrolled.

Education Savings Accounts, or ESA's, have been called vouchers 2.0 or the new frontier in education choice. Similar to vouchers, ESA's allow families to utilize public education dollars to pay for the education they determine is best for their child. However, the funds flow directly from the state to the parent, rather than the school. The parent can then decide how those funds are spent from an array of educational options including not just private school tuition, but also tutoring, therapy, textbooks, online curriculum, transportation, etc. Mississippi passed the nation's third ESA in 2015 for students with special needs. Funding for the program has been limited to 425 students, resulting in a waiting list for the program during the 2016-2017 school year.

Tax credit scholarships allow individuals and corporations to make donations to a scholarship granting organization that then provides private school scholarships. Donors then receive up to a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on their state income tax. There are currently 21 tax credit scholarship programs available in 17 states, but not Mississippi. This includes one of the nation's largest single school choice programs, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which has approximately 100,000 students participating.

Regardless of the specific type of program, there are certain parameters that need to be in place if a program is going to be universal, have the potential to reshape the education system, and offer meaningful change. These include broad eligibility standards, limited regulations, and equal funding.

A school choice program needs a critical mass of potential students to pave the way for new private schools and education providers and to have a true impact on the broader education system. The goal should be universal, or near universal, eligibility.<sup>24</sup> Too often these programs are limited to certain demographics, such as students with special needs, students in failing schools, or low-income students. This is what Mississippi has done with both public charter schools and private school choice programs. It is certainly a laudable goal to provide these populations who for too long have been left behind with new education options, but limiting the populations who are eligible in any regard will likely not cause the market to expand.

School choice programs should let private schools maintain their autonomy and let parents judge the performance of the school they choose. When school choice programs place burdensome regulations on private schools, two things generally happen: The best schools choose not to participate and families are left to choose among low-performing schools that are simply looking for new revenue

This is exactly what happened in Louisiana where, even though it was well-intentioned, their voucher program required all participating private schools to alter their admissions process, accept the scholarship as payment in full, administer state tests, and provide mountains of paperwork to the state. The schools that were the most successful passed on the program because they did not need it to survive. As a result, parents' choices were severely diminished and it became the first private school choice program where students' academic outcomes decreased after entering a private school. However, by the third year the negative impact of the program has been removed.

Funding for a school choice program should mirror what the state is already paying for education. For example, New Hampshire has a tax credit scholarship program which is light on regulations and even

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<sup>23</sup> See, EdChoice (2017).

<sup>24</sup> For funding purposes, states often limit school choice programs to only students who are currently enrolled in a district or charter school. This will ensure a program does not have a negative "fiscal note."

allows homeschool families to participate, but the maximum scholarship amount is just \$2,655, much less than the average cost of tuition to a private school. As a result, just 178 students participated in the 2015-2016 school year. In New Hampshire and elsewhere, too often school choice programs offer scholarship amounts that are just a fraction of what is spent in district schools, which prevents many students from being able to participate.

## What Options Are Currently Available In Mississippi?

Mississippi is relatively new to the school choice arena, passing the state's first private school choice program in 2012 and authorizing charter schools for the first time in 2013. For the 2016-2017 school year, 1,125 Mississippi students participated in a school choice program out of more than 490,000 students enrolled in a district school.<sup>25</sup> This is a modest number, far behind many states, but it is a sharp increase from just 32 students in the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>26</sup> (See Figure 13.3.)

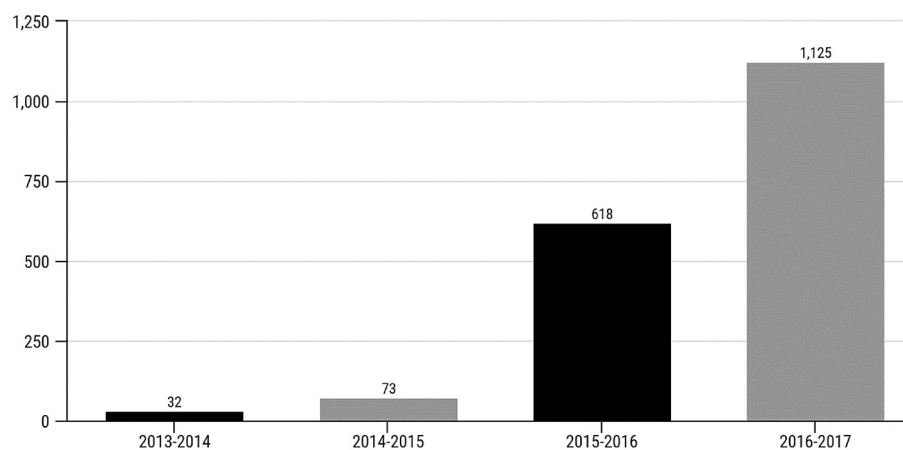
Mississippi's school choice programs take several forms. Mississippi had three charter schools open in the 2016-2017 school year, serving 528 students in the city of Jackson. Mississippi was one of the last states to join the charter school movement. The state's first charter schools opened for the 2015-2016 school year.

The current law created a state authorizing board who is the sole authorizer of charter schools in the state. If a charter wishes to open in a school district rated "A," "B," or "C," they first need to get approval from the local school board. That has yet to occur, and the focus has instead been on failing school districts. Students who wish to attend a charter school

must either reside in the school district where the charter is opening, or they can cross district lines if they attend a school district rated "C," "D," or "F."

Mississippi's first private school choice program was designed exclusively for students with dyslexia, which was the only program of its kind in the nation. This program has been serving students since the 2012-2013 school year. For the 2016-2017 school year, 159 students participated in the program. Every eligible student receives a scholarship equal to the base student cost calculated through the state's funding formula, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP). While this program has steadily grown, it

**Figure 13.3: School choice enrollment in Mississippi**



Source: Mississippi Dept. of Education

<sup>25</sup> This number is based off enrollment in Mississippi's charter schools and three private school choice programs detailed on the next page. This does not include enrollment in private school (except for those receiving an ESA or voucher), students in magnet schools, or those who are homeschooled.

<sup>26</sup> See, Kittredge (2016).

is limited in its reach because of a requirement in the law mandating participating schools be accredited by the Mississippi Department of Education. As a result, just five schools are currently participating.

Mississippi also has a speech language therapy scholarship. This allows students with speech language impairments to receive a voucher equal to the base student cost of MAEP. This program was enacted in 2013, but has never served more than 14 children a year. Very few schools qualify because they not only must be accredited by the state, but they must have speech language therapy as their primary purpose for the school. This restricts schools that would otherwise meet the needs of students who qualify for the scholarship but serve students with multiple types of disabilities.

Mississippi became the third state in the nation to approve a Special Needs Education Scholarship Account in 2015. Scholarships were initially worth \$6,500, but that number fluctuates with increases or decreases to the base student cost in the state. Because parents are able to customize their child's education, the scholarship can be used on a number of educational services, including private school, tutoring, therapy, textbooks, curriculum, district school classes, transportation, and testing fees. Unlike the Dyslexia Scholarship and Speech Language Therapy Scholarship, which place heavy burdens on participating schools, this program only requires schools be accredited.

For a student to be eligible, they must have received an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the past five years. For the 2016-2017 school year, all 425 slots in the program were filled with many more on the waiting list. In fact, the greatest limitation to this program has been level funding that has not allowed the program to grow as it was authorized to in its first three years.

While this program is limited in eligibility and funding, it put a platform in place to truly revolutionize education for Mississippi students if expanded broadly. Until then, Mississippi will have a long way to go before the state nears any type of market-based approach to education for every family.

## What Does The Data Show?

The empirical data on school choice shows that it has a history of improving not only the academic outcomes of participants but of students that remain in public schools as well.

- Fourteen of the 18 random assignment studies show choice participants' academic scores improved as a result of participating in a private school choice program. Two of the studies showed no visible effect on test scores and two showed a negative effect.<sup>27</sup>
- The two studies that showed negative results were both from Louisiana. This chapter previously referenced the government regulations imposed on participating private schools in the Louisiana Scholarship Program, and the negative effect it had in the first two years of the program.
- Thirty-one of 33 studies found that the market effects from a school choice program led to academic improvements in local district schools, including schools in Louisiana.
- Every study conducted on the fiscal impact of school choice has found that such programs either save tax dollars, or have no visible effect. Twenty-five studies have shown that school choice programs have a positive fiscal impact, while three have shown no visible impact. A review of school choice programs found a cumulative savings ranging from \$1.7 billion to \$3.4 billion through the 2013-2014 school year.

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<sup>27</sup> See, Forster (2016).



Lawmakers today do not need to wait for a study to determine if school choice works. They do not need to act on speculation on what may or may not happen, whether positive or negative. Twenty-six years after the first modern school choice program, the empirical evidence shows that everyone involved—participants, district schools, and taxpayers—benefits from school choice.

## Parents are the Ultimate Accountability Measure

A universal school choice program puts parents in control and allows them to make the best education decisions for their child. While there are numerous accountability measures in place to determine the quality of education a child is receiving, such as standardized test scores, school grades, or graduation rate, the most important and most overlooked measure is parental satisfaction.

Parents are attuned to their child's unique learning needs and educational progress in ways that may not be measured accurately by a standardized test. And every survey that has measured parental satisfaction has one underlying point: Parents are more satisfied with their child's school if they are free to choose that school.<sup>28</sup>

That correlates with the findings of Empower Mississippi's report on parental satisfaction in Mississippi's Special Needs ESA program. *The Special Needs ESA: What Families Enrolled In The Program Are Saying After One Year* tested parental satisfaction with the program, with a child's new educational setting, and with the ease of using the program and receiving reimbursements.<sup>29</sup>

The survey found that 91% of ESA parents are highly satisfied with the ESA program, with 63% reporting being very satisfied and another 28% being somewhat satisfied. The survey also found that 98% of respondents were satisfied with the school or educational program they chose for their child. This contrasts sharply with the parents' levels of satisfaction at their child's previous assigned district school, where 38% were very unsatisfied and an additional 29% were somewhat unsatisfied with the school or program in which their child was educated before enrolling in the ESA program. Overall, 67% were not satisfied with the previous program, while 24% were satisfied and only 5% were very satisfied. Figure 13.4 summarizes these findings.

Making decisions today is easier than it has ever been with crowd sourcing and user generated reviews. Just as Yelp has provided user generated reviews on hotels and restaurants, websites like Private School Review, School Digger, Great Schools, and Niche allow anyone to read reviews from parents and students on the schools in their community.

Many families utilize private outlets like Forbes, Princeton Review, and U.S. News & World Report for perspectives on choosing the right college and websites like Rate My Professors offer peer review options for students. Why is K-12 any different? State run accountability systems are far from the only- or even best- means of evaluating education options.

## Market Based Education Works

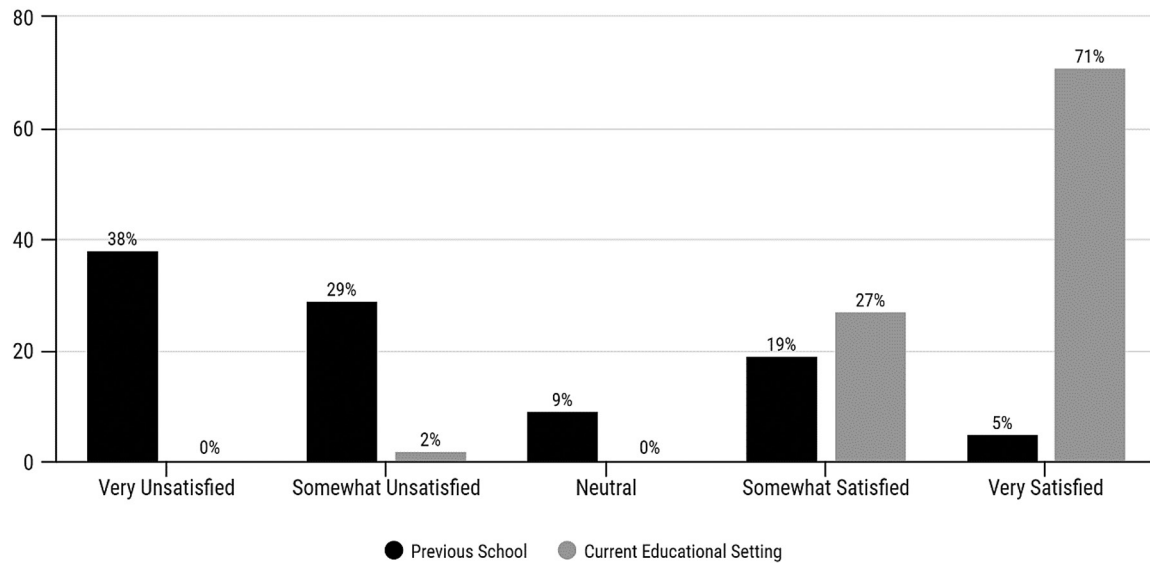
Arizona is the closest model to a free market education setting in the United States. Today they have five private school choice programs serving nearly 70,000 students. That number is likely to increase in the coming years after the legislature expanded the state's ESA to universal (but capped) eligibility over

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<sup>28</sup> See, Stewart (2014).

<sup>29</sup> See, Kittredge (2016).

**Figure 13.4: Satisfaction level among ESA participants**



Source: *The Special Needs ESA: What Families Enrolled In The Program Are Saying After One Year*

a several year phase-in period. They also have more than 15 percent of public school students attending a charter school.

Arizona has over 600 charter schools with more than 200 charters opening since 2010 alone. Yet at the same time 100 charter schools were also closed.<sup>30</sup> Remarkably, most of these failing schools have not being closed by the state, but rather by parents. If parents believe their child is not getting a great education, they are voting with their feet. Those schools that closed lasted, on average, just four years and had an average of 62 students their final year. Parents in Arizona enjoy school choice, and they are able to make immediate decisions about their child's future. If a school is not performing at a level they believe it should, they do not have to wait for it to improve. They can simply move on.

Figure 13.5 shows that charter schools in Arizona are now competing with the most highly regarded district schools in the country. The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores show charter students in Arizona are nearly even with Massachusetts and ahead of New Hampshire, Minnesota, and New Jersey, which are states that spend among the most in the country per student.

At the same time, students in traditional district schools have experienced similar gains. In fact, Arizona led the nation in growth on the NAEP science test from 2009 to 2015. While Arizona has spent two decades providing families access to public and private school choice, all students have seen a benefit.

**Figure 13.5: 2015 NAEP Scores, 8th Grade Math**

State	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math Scores	Spending per student
Massachusetts	297	\$15,087
Arizona (charter schools)	296	\$7,528
New Hampshire	294	\$14,335
Minnesota	294	\$11,464
New Jersey	293	\$17,907

<sup>30</sup> See, Ladner (2016).

It turns out, when parents are given the opportunity to choose the best school for their children, children in both schools of choice and traditional district schools do better.

In a small way, Mississippi has seen the market effects of a school choice program. The 3-D School in Petal, MS is a specialty school that provides comprehensive dyslexia therapy services for students. Many of the families receive either the Dyslexia Scholarship or Special Needs ESA to help cover the cost of tuition. Because very few schools offer the services they provide, some families travel up to four hours per day roundtrip for their children to attend the school. The school is now opening a second location on the Gulf Coast due to this demand created by the school offering a high quality product and the scholarship programs that make the school more affordable for families.

## **What About The Supply Side?**

The first part of the school choice battle, and the area that has drawn the most attention, is passing a law that provides every parent with the option to choose the right educational setting for their child. What if Mississippi passed a universal school choice bill tomorrow? Parents need to have options, thus, the second part of the discussion involves the supply side of a market based education.

If parents suddenly had the ability to receive a scholarship from the state to choose the best school for their child, new schools would open and current, high quality schools would expand due to demand from parents. As the program matures, parents would be able to judge the viability of all schools, whether public or private. In this scenario, parents have the ability to choose and schools must work to attract students and prove they are the best choice for that child. For the first time, all schools would be competing on the same playing field, and each school would have an incentive to develop the best product for their consumers: Mississippi families. District schools today can generally ignore the small population that is in a school choice program because it has not affected their educational market share. Therefore, they are not incentivized to meet the demands of parents. In this scenario, they would not enjoy that luxury, and families would expect schools to perform the way they expect any product they purchase to perform.

Education is not, and should not be, different than any other sector of our economy.

## **Conclusion**

There is no one answer that will solve every education woe overnight. In fact, those top-down proposals have often been the problem. For too long, lawmakers have concentrated on well-minded, but small and administration centric reforms that do not move the needle as it relates to real choice, accountability, or academic improvements.

In reality, the goal is simple: Schools should be permitted to innovate, and parents should be free to choose in order to provide every child access to a quality education, regardless of the provider.

School choice programs should have universal eligibility, providing all parents with the ability to make the best decision for their child's unique learning needs. Private schools should be allowed to maintain their autonomy, free of government regulations that often stifle academic growth, and parents should be able to judge the performance of their child's school while being able to compare one school to another.

In this model, new schools would open and expand to meet the demands of families and all schools would finally be competing on a level playing field for students and would be incentivized to produce an excellent product that appeals to their consumers.

Mississippi has started in this direction. And while lawmakers should be commended for approving any type of school choice proposal thus far, if they want to see fundamental change, they need to begin thinking on a larger scale.

To promote prosperity, Mississippi needs to develop a truly market based approach to education where every parent has the options to personalize their child's education, and private schools are permitted to maintain the autonomy that has allowed them to flourish. Anything short of that is not market based, and will not help Mississippi, or the United States, achieve the goal of providing every child with a high quality education.

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# Summary of Chapter Conclusions

## **PART 1. Introduction: The Role of Government and Economic Growth**

### **Chapter 1: The Case for Growth—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University**

- Mississippi is the poorest state in the United States in terms of per capita income. Mississippi underperforms economically relative to all of its bordering states.
- Focusing on policies that generate economic growth is the most viable pathway to alleviating Mississippi's weak economic condition.
- Very small changes in economic growth rates may yield vast positive changes in the quality of life for Mississippi residents within as little time as one to two generations.
- Focusing on economic growth does not mean that other important policy goals such as improving health and education and reducing crime are neglected.

### **Chapter 2: The Sources of Economic Growth—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University**

- The economic activity of a state necessarily occurs within that area's institutional context, including the legal, regulatory, and tax environments, as well as the degree of private property rights. The quality of these institutions affects the output of economic activity.
- Capitalism is an economic system based on the private ownership of productive assets within an economy.
- Abundant evidence demonstrates that areas with institutions that allow capitalism to thrive experience much higher levels of prosperity relative to areas that do not rely upon capitalism.



### **Chapter 3: Why Capitalism Works—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University**

- The prosperity of an area is determined by the total quantity of production and quality of goods and services that individuals value. This prosperity is influenced by factors such as the degree of specialization of labor, capital investment, and entrepreneurship.
- Capitalism is an economic system that generates prosperity because its decentralized nature supports the specialization of labor, capital investment, and entrepreneurship.
- Government policies, even when well-intentioned, often create harmful unintended consequences. This is often due to the more centralized nature of government decisions.

## **PART 2: Promoting Prosperity One Issue at a Time**

### **Chapter 4: Why are Taxes so Taxing? —Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University**

- High taxes can be extremely costly. In addition to the cost of the tax itself, taxes create indirect costs including enforcement costs, administrative costs, and costs incurred from distortions of the market economy.
- Mississippi has a higher tax burden compared to its bordering states. This may negatively affect the location decisions of businesses and individuals, causing them to leave the state.
- Empirical evidence demonstrates that high tax rates significantly dampen rates of economic growth.

### **Chapter 5: Make Business Taxes More Competitive—Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University**

- State and local taxes represent a significant cost for businesses. These tax costs affect the location decisions of businesses and deter them from operating in Mississippi.
- In addition to corporate income taxes, there are a myriad of other taxes businesses pay, such as property taxes and inventory taxes. Some taxes such as the inventory tax and intangible property tax do not exist in the majority of other U.S. states.
- To generate more prosperity within the state, Mississippi should consider reducing its tax burden upon businesses.

**Chapter 6: “Selective Incentives,” Crony Capitalism and Economic Development—  
Thomas A. Garrett, University of Mississippi, and William F. Shughart II,  
Utah State University**

- This chapter evaluates the costs and benefits of targeted tax incentives designed to lure new private business enterprises to Mississippi.
- Our analysis demonstrates that Mississippi is poorer, not richer, by funding incentive programs.
- Reasons that incentive packages fail include no new employment since many individuals hired were previously employed, the additional tax cost to accommodate the new population growth, and resources allocated to funding the subsidies could have been spent on better schools, roads, or used to finance a reduction in tax rates for all.
- The funds now being spent to benefit a handful of private business owners could be used to finance broad-based reductions in tax rates and lightening the regulatory burden on all Mississippians.

**Chapter 7: Incentive-Based Compensation and Economic Growth—  
Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University**

- Incentive based compensation is a payment method where an individual’s pay is in some way tied to their performance. Economic literatures studying incentive based pay for executives show that use of incentive based pay improves company performance and by extension state economies.
- Empirical data shows that firms in Mississippi use incentive-based compensation less than similar firms in other states.
- Mississippi can help improve its economic position by restructuring parts of its tax code to allow for greater use of incentive based executive compensation.

**Chapter 8: Mississippi Shadow Economies: A Symptom of Over-Regulated  
Markets and Measure of Missed Opportunities—Travis Wiseman,  
Mississippi State University**

- This chapter discusses Mississippi’s regulatory environment and the state’s cumbersome habit of maintaining outdated and burdensome regulation, far longer than other states.
- Several sensible and low-cost reforms are introduced that can help curtail unwanted shadow economic activity, and promote prosperity in Mississippi.
- A case study of one industry that Mississippi over-regulates – the brewing industry – is discussed.

## **Chapter 9: Occupational Licensing in Mississippi—Daniel J. Smith, Troy University**

- Occupational licensing, the regulation of individual entry to a profession, enables industry practitioners to restrict entry to their profession and raise prices on consumers.
- The effects of occupational licensing fall heaviest on low-income residents who must pay higher prices or resort to lower-quality home-production or black market provision.
- Mississippi has at least 118 different occupational categories with licensing, representing nearly 20 percent of Mississippi's labor force.
- The total estimated initial licensing costs in Mississippi exceed \$48 million and the estimated annual renewal costs add up to over \$13.5 million.
- Mississippi policymakers can promote prosperity in Mississippi by removing unnecessary and overtly burdensome licensing laws.

## **Chapter 10: Prosperity Districts: A Ladder Out of Last Place—Trey Goff, Out of Last Place Alliance**

- Prosperity districts are geographically self-contained areas that reduce or eliminate unnecessary government restrictions on business activity, including regulation, taxation, and private subsidization
- Prosperity districts can be a unique and promising solution to the state's economic woes by allowing specific areas to be exempt from unproductive policies.
- Prosperity districts allow experimentation to determine which policies work best.
- Real world examples of the potential success of prosperity districts can be seen in the closely related concept of special economic zones, which have seen tremendous economic growth and development in places such as Singapore.

## **Chapter 11: Promoting Prosperity in Mississippi through Investing in Communities—Ken B. Cyree, University of Mississippi, and Jon Maynard, Oxford Economic Development Foundation**

- We investigate the impact of investing in community livability and the relation to the change in total employment to promote prosperity in Mississippi.
- We document the decline in Mississippi employment, on average, from 2007-2016, and especially the decline in manufacturing employment.
- Our analysis shows that increased employment is significantly related to better school rankings, higher changes in wages, and higher changes in per capita retail sales. New business creation is not statistically related to employment.
- Our results suggest that in order to promote prosperity in Mississippi, we should invest in quality of life for the community.

## **Chapter 12: Local Governments Run Amok? A Guide for State Officials Considering Local Preemption—Michael D. Farren, George Mason University, and Adam A. Millsap, Florida State University**

- Local governments sometimes implement regulations and ordinances that stifle economic growth.
- Preemption is a legal doctrine asserting that state law takes precedence over local law. In some cases it should be used by state governments to overrule local governments.
- State officials should consider preemption when local rules violate the principles of generality or free exchange. Such policies often involve barriers to entry, price controls, or business practice mandates.
- Violations of generality and free exchange harm economic growth because they inhibit economic activity and the efficient allocation of resources. Conversely, preempting such policies promotes economic growth.

## **Chapter 13: School Choice: How To Unleash the Market in Education— Brett Kittredge, Empower Mississippi**

- The United States has fallen behind other countries in K-12 education. One study found that American students ranked 38th out of 71 countries when tested in math, reading, and science.
- A government monopoly has existed in our delivery of education in the United States. Students are assigned to a school based on their zip code and the year they were born.
- Because students are assigned to a school based on a district line, real estate prices naturally rise in neighborhoods within a desirable school district. This has the effect of pricing out many families and forcing them to live in areas with less desirable schools.
- To improve quality, our education system should be student centered and market based. Parents should have options available to craft a custom education for their child based on their specific learning needs.
- The legislature can adopt a market based education through a universal school choice program that has broad eligibility, autonomy for all schools, and level funding across the various educational sectors.

## **Chapter 14: Medicaid: A Government Monopoly That Hurts the Poor— Jameson Taylor, MS Center for Public Policy**

- State health care policy revolves around Medicaid, which is a government-subsidized insurance program consuming one-third of Mississippi's budget.
- Health outcomes for Medicaid insurance patients are very poor; patients with no insurance at all fare better.
- Medicaid's number one problem, like that of many American insurance plans, is that it incentivizes the over utilization of health care while insulating recipients from the financial consequences of poor lifestyle choices.

- Medicaid is crowding out the development of innovative products and policy ideas.
- Reforms aimed at unleashing the power of health care pricing including large HSAs, direct surgical care, and comparative shopping incentives can begin to disrupt Medicaid's monopoly.

## **Chapter 15: Tipping the Scales: Curbing Mississippi's Obesity Problem— Raymond J. March, San Jose State University**

- Widespread obesity has serious health and financial consequences in Mississippi.
- Government policy, although well intended, is associated with increased levels of obesity especially for lower-income households.
- State-led efforts to reduce obesity are costly and unlikely to succeed because they fail to address the underlying causes of why less healthy food options are consumed.
- Private and local solutions are more effective in promoting health and reducing obesity.
- The most effective way to combat widespread obesity is the market, not the government.

## **Chapter 16: Criminal Justice Reform in Mississippi—Trey Goff, Out of Last Place Alliance**

- Despite decreasing rates of both violent and property crime since 1996, Mississippi incarceration rates have steadily increased.
- Mississippi has an incarceration rate that is among the highest in the world, most due to incarcerating non-violent crimes.
- The economic drain from this level of mass incarceration is extremely detrimental for the state economy in terms of both the cost of maintaining incarceration and the negative effects of incarceration upon individuals in the labor market.
- Reevaluating and restructuring the criminal justice system in Mississippi to reduce incarceration rates would be an extremely effective tool to increase the economic strength and wellbeing of the state.

## **Chapter 17: Property Takings: Eminent Domain and Civil Asset Forfeiture— Carrie B. Kerekes, Florida Gulf Coast University**

- Secure private property rights provide incentives for individuals to undertake investments and make capital improvements to their property and businesses. To promote prosperity, Mississippi policy makers should continue to improve laws and policies to restrict property takings.
- Following reforms passed in 2011 to protect against development takings, property owners in Mississippi are reasonably protected from eminent domain takings.
- Citizens are significantly less protected in the case of civil asset forfeiture. Civil asset forfeiture laws in Mississippi provide incentives for law enforcement agencies to seize private property.

**Chapter 18: The Small-Dollar Loan Landscape in Mississippi: Products, Regulations, Examples, and Research Findings on Interest Rate Caps—Thomas (Tom) William Miller, Jr., Mississippi State University**

- The best fuel for economic growth and prosperity is free market prices, including interest rates.
- Despite the goal of improving consumer welfare, interest rate caps often harm the very people legislatures intend to help—especially users of small-dollar loan products.
- Despite their well-known harmful effects on consumers, laws continue to fetter consumer credit markets with interest rate caps.
- Setting good rules governing how legitimate businesses provide access to consumer credit is important for everyone living in Mississippi.
- The Mississippi legislature can greatly help consumers by eliminating, or greatly raising, interest rate caps in all small-dollar loan markets.

**Chapter 19: Natural Disasters and Prosperity in Mississippi—Daniel Sutter, Troy University**

- Extreme weather poses a severe financial risk for a state economy. Mississippi is particularly exposed to the threat of damage from natural disasters.
- Free market practices often perform better at meeting the challenges posed by natural disasters rather than government policies. Removal of harmful policies such as occupational licensing and building codes during disaster may better allow the market to speed disaster recovery.
- Some government policies such as flood and wind insurance may exacerbate exposure to natural disasters. Other policies slow recovery time by creating uncertainty after the occurrence of a natural disaster.

**Chapter 20: Learning from Disasters in Mississippi—Stefanie Haeffele and Virgil Henry Storr, George Mason University**

- This chapter examines disaster recovery in Mississippi and how policies that foster entrepreneurship might help spur disaster recovery going forward.
- Entrepreneurs can spur disaster recovery by providing needed goods and services, restoring disrupted social networks, and acting as focal points around which other residents can coordinate their recovery efforts.
- To promote prosperity in Mississippi, officials should develop policies that ensure that entrepreneurs have the space to act in the wake of disaster.





# About the Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University

The Institute for Market Studies (IMS) at Mississippi State University, created in 2015, is a nonprofit research and educational organization conducting scholarly research and providing educational opportunities to advance the study of free enterprise.

The IMS's mission is to support the study of markets and provide a deeper understanding regarding the role of markets in creating widely shared prosperity. This includes advancing sound policies based on the principles of free enterprise, individual liberty, and limited government. The IMS pursues its mission by bringing together leading scholars to conduct timely research on current economic and financial issues.

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*"Promoting Prosperity in Mississippi contains transformative ideas for Mississippi on virtually every page. If Ideas have consequences, I hope the consequences of these ideas spread like wildfire across Mississippi, spurring economic prosperity, entrepreneurship, and human flourishing. Every policymaker and citizen should read this book."*

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*"Individual initiative is an infinitely more powerful and productive economic force than government action.*

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*"Economic freedom has been the greatest catalyst of innovation, prosperity and wellbeing in human history. People free to use their gifts and pursue their passions have created endless value and improved countless lives. *Promoting Prosperity in Mississippi* is a clarion call to all who love Mississippi, and her people, to embrace the transformative policies of free enterprise and reject a rigged economy that limits our potential. The compilation articulates a practical path forward—one of hope and opportunity for all Mississippians."*

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