



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**  
ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

# Opinion Editorial

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## **Broadcast Mississippi's Best Public Education!**

**By: Andy Gipson**  
**Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce**

As the father of four school age children in rural Mississippi, I would like to propose a common-sense enhancement to COVID era education. My proposal won't cost hundreds of millions of dollars; it won't take decades to implement; and it will provide an immediate workable solution for our teachers, students and parents. Put simply, my proposal is to Broadcast Mississippi's Best Education. We can do it starting tomorrow at virtually no cost to taxpayers. How? Broadcast our best teachers over the public digital television infrastructure already accessible by every Mississippi home.

We enjoy living on our farm in rural Mississippi, but like most rural Mississippians, we don't have access to high speed broadband internet. We did the best we could during the spring COVID semester, but internet-based distance learning is not realistic for most folks like us in rural Mississippi. We found that our children were more frustrated attempting to "zoom" and getting knocked off the internet. Homework was lost in transmission adding to the stress. Without the infrastructure, online learning just cannot work this far out in the country, even if every child were to have an iPad or other digital device. That's why as your Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, I strongly support every available method of deploying high speed broadband in the rural areas of Mississippi. I fully support more and faster broadband out here in the country, and I appreciate the Legislature and the Mississippi Public Service Commission's initiatives in this regard.

But what we need is a comprehensive statewide educational digital broadcast plan as we transition to rural broadband statewide. Out here in rural Mississippi, we can't wait for years or decades for our children to get high speed internet. Our children will be grown by then. Our kids need access to quality education at home, statewide, right now. We've seen entire school classes and grades sent home for quarantine and we know this is likely to continue. Parents, teachers and students are facing tremendous stress and uncertainty as students are sent home for weeks at a time, during this COVID pandemic. Many parents have decided to homeschool for the first time. These are just some of the reasons I am proposing to Broadcast Mississippi's Best Education - starting right now.

As an immediate educational response to COVID-19, I support a partnership between Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB) and the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to devote a 24/7 educational digital television and radio channel that would include daily instruction by a rotation of Mississippi's very

best K-12 teachers by grade, and every basic educational subject. I've already personally confirmed this is possible with the leadership of both MPB and MDE.

Students and parents could tune in with a set daily routine of instruction. This program would reach every household in Mississippi - no matter how rural or urban. For those distance learning through the local schools, assignments and homework would be turned in and graded by a child's local teachers, so students would continue getting direct input from the teachers and local school districts who know the student's personal needs. Those on quarantine or choosing to homeschool their children would have a daily routine of consistent instruction, as well as providing new opportunities to reinforce studies for the children attending in person.

The pedagogy and curriculum can be crafted by the experts. But my vision is that every weekday, each grade has several short lessons with corresponding assignments, followed by the next grade level, and the next. This certainly wouldn't replace in-room instruction but could supplement those at home wanting to advance and not fall behind. For those that do have access to high speed internet, all the lessons could be archived and enhanced with downloadable materials. It isn't a perfect plan; but we should never let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

This simple idea - Broadcast Mississippi's Best Education - could reach every home and every child in Mississippi with a digital TV antenna, cable TV or radio, at practically no cost to taxpayers. And it can be archived and utilized via the internet, as well. We already have the infrastructure, and I am certain our best teachers across the state would gladly step up to participate.

Just as important, this concept has the potential to present a complete paradigm shift for Mississippi's future. Even in normal times, this broadcast would be the perfect opportunity to reinforce learning for every Mississippi child attending school. Our children deserve the best education they can receive, whether attending in person, distance learning, or home schooling. Let's get this done for all of Mississippi's children.

Agriculture Commissioner Andy Gipson  
Dad of Four Children in Rural Mississippi

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