

## Transforming Public Education is Goal of New School Principal Prep Program

Contributed by Tobie Baker  
06/19/2009

10 students from around state enrolled in inaugural class

OXFORD, Miss. - Public education in Mississippi is at a crossroads, and University of Mississippi officials believe they have a road map to success.

With a shortage of school principals statewide, UM's Mississippi Principal Corps, an innovative, state-of-the-art principal preparation program, enrolled its inaugural class in late May with the goal of producing highly effective school administrators.

"The purpose of the Mississippi Principal Corps is to transform public education in this state from where we are now to the very top of all states," said Doug Davis, coordinator of UM's educational leadership programs. "We need sustained transformation, and leadership is the central theme for that success."

The 13-month, 36-credit-hour graduate program's first class of 10 teachers and former teachers includes Elizabeth Boggs, sixth-grade math teacher at Olive Branch Middle School; Marcus Boudreaux, history teacher at Biloxi Junior High School; Dawn Davis, English language-learners teacher at Southaven Intermediate School; Lisa Hudson, resource specialist for the Rankin County School District; Elaine Ward Ivy, lead teacher at Aberdeen Elementary School; Serenity Lockett, director of network communications for the Parents' Campaign in Jackson; Linda Patton, a teacher in the Holmes County School District in Lexington; Brooke Phillips, eighth-grade English teacher at Olive Branch Middle School; Landon Pollard, case manager at the Madison County Adolescent Offender Program; and Toby Price, fifth-grade teacher at Flowood Elementary School.

"This is a hard task we face to better education, but we have to start somewhere," Boudreaux said. "I want to pick up the torch and make great strides in the right direction."

Pollard agreed, saying, "A lot can be fixed. We're at a now-or-never point. As leaders, we have to step up and forge new paths, because the alternative is rather bleak."

Sensing an urgency to enable committed educators to make a difference in schools around the state, Jim Barksdale, former president and CEO of Netscape Communications Corp., helped fund the Principal Corps program. Support for participants includes a full-time internship and a \$10,000 signing bonus to those who complete the program.

"No school can be any better than its principal," Barksdale said from his Jackson office. "A really good principal has a lot to do with the success of his or her school."

"We're winners or we're losers. We care or we don't care. We're there for the children or we're not. Those are all driven by the quality of the leadership of a principal."

Tom Burnham, UM dean of education, echoed Barksdale's same sentiments during the program's recent orientation

session.

"If you're a principal and your school isn't a success, then take a look in the mirror," Burnham told the future principals. "That's the bottom line. Successful schools are the product of successful principals. Without outstanding leadership, we will not have outstanding schools.

"The foundation for successful leadership lies in courage. The type of courage needed, so many times, to make the right, gut-wrenching decisions to better education are never easy, but we are here to help you learn how to make those decisions."

The Principal Corps curriculum includes five core areas of study: leading quality instruction, supporting quality instruction, leading curriculum and assessment, leading change, and managing operations for learning.

For more information visit the Mississippi Principal Corps Web site .