



INITIATIVE 42 – THE REAL ONE

THE ONLY INITIATIVE FOR OUR SCHOOLS

Q: Why do we need Initiative 42?

A: Simple, the Mississippi Legislature refuses to abide by its own law, denying our public schools the promised financial support they need for our children to succeed.

Here's the background: To avoid an equity lawsuit in 1997, the Legislature passed what's called the **Mississippi Adequate Education Program**, which established a "floor" formula to ensure that each public school district receives enough financial support to adequately fund its K-12 education programs. But, the Legislature has not kept its promise - MAEP has been fully funded only two times since then.

Over the past six years, our public schools have lost nearly **\$1.7 billion** due to underfunding by the Mississippi Legislature. Textbooks are out of date, buses need to be replaced, classrooms are crowded, facilities have leaky roofs and our local districts must dig deeper to pay for too many unfunded mandates from Jackson.

Passage of Initiative 42 will strengthen our constitution and force the Legislature to follow the law it passed 18 years ago.

Our children cannot be ready for good jobs without good educations. Our state cannot support good jobs without a good workforce. We must make sure our children and our business community have that chance.

Q: What is this "alternative" initiative the Legislature passed in January?

A: It's **a dirty trick to confuse voters** and kill the real initiative, 42. This trick initiative, 42-A, will provide no additional funding for K-12 and keeps the status quo. Initiative 42 requires the state to keep its 18-year-old promise and fund an "adequate and efficient" system of free public schools. If the Legislature upholds its own law, no additional action will be needed. If our lawmakers refuse to abide by the constitution, our state court system will step in all the way to the Mississippi Supreme Court.

A legislative alternative is a slap in the faces of the nearly 200,000 citizens, who courageously signed the petitions and showed they want change. In the more than 20 years since the initiative law was passed, no alternative has EVER been passed by the Legislature. **In the end, the alternative is a political ploy to kill Initiative 42, because such a trick will only confuse voters**, with neither Initiative 42 nor the alternative getting the overall required number of votes (at least 40% of the total cast in the top-voted race).

Q: Won't this constitutional amendment put the power to decide K-12 funding in the hands of one Hinds County judge?

A: Not true. No legal action will be needed if the Legislature fully funds its own formula. The amendment only requires that the state law be followed. First, because of a separate law passed by the Legislature, **virtually all legal action against the state originates in Hinds County.** If the Legislature wants to change the venue, it can. Second, all appeals to decisions by any Hinds County judge go to the Mississippi Supreme Court, where nine elected members, from all areas of the state, have the final say. No matter what, **the Legislature will retain its constitutional authority to decide how taxpayer money is spent.**

Q: If school districts get more funding, won't they just spend it on more administrators and higher salaries for them?

A: No. **Mississippi's administrative costs are at or below the national average.** If you ask local school leaders, they will tell you that full funding will help them reduce the student-to-teacher ratio, acquire needed technology, replace old buses and upgrade crumbling facilities. They also say that full funding could help our school districts avoid local bond issues and increased property taxes. In many districts where administrative costs have risen, it's because of unfunded mandates from new federal and state requirements. In some districts, instructional spending is down because of teacher/aide cuts forced by tough financial times during the Recession and underfunding by the state.

Q: The state has spent a lot of money on K-12 since MAEP was passed 18 years ago. But our ACT scores are virtually flat. Why should we spend more without measurable results?

A: Analyzing ACT composite scores is **the wrong way** to measure overall student success. At least 90% of Mississippi's high school graduates take the ACT (nearly the highest rate in the nation, which ultimately causes our ACT scores to be lower due to a high prevalence of non-college bound scores being mixed with those of college bound students.) Most states with higher ACT composite scores than Mississippi do not test such a large percentage of its students. Even so, the national ACT composite score, and composite scores of Mississippi's neighboring states, also have remained flat – an indication that the scores of the ACT don't tend to change much over time.

Q: Isn't K-12 already getting a huge chunk of the state budget?

A: No. **Public education is only about 23% of the state budget**, although you hear a much higher number thrown about so often that people start to believe it. When you add in federal funds and fees to the state budget, public education is about 16.5%.

Q: Won't full funding for K-12 hurt other agency budgets?

A: No, the difference between what's promised for K-12 and what has been funded is the amount put into the Rainy Day Fund last year. This year, that money is available for K-12 without touching any other budgets. While the Legislature could reach full funding for K-12 in many ways, Initiative 42's supporters suggest it be achieved over 6-7 years from funds generated by allocating at least 25% of the growth of General Fund revenues.

Q: How much is “enough” money for education?

A: **The Legislature decided 18 years ago what amount was “adequate” for K-12 education.** That's the number we're talking about, already a state law. It's not our number – **it's the Legislature's number.** But our elected leaders have followed that law only twice in 18 years – election years. If they think there's something wrong with that law, then change it! Our local schools need Initiative 42 to ensure adequate funding every year.

Q: If I vote yes for Initiative 42, will the new amendment raise my taxes?

A: No, absolutely not. If the Legislature cannot fully fund MAEP right away, Initiative 42 proposes a conservative, responsible method to phase-in funding across several years using NEW money from economic growth, not from other agencies' budgets or tax increases. Our state's economy usually grows 2-3 percent every year. If we can require adequate school funding from that NEW money, over a few years it will build until we have full funding for our schools.

It's the "dirty trick" Initiative 42-A that's likely to cause a tax increase. If the state fails to live up to its promised K-12 funding, our local governments – cities and counties – will be forced to consider raising property taxes to bridge the financial gaps.

Q: When will the ballot be available so we can see how to vote on Initiative #42?

A: Not until after Sept. 9, when the state sample ballot is approved. While state law describes how the Initiative Ballot should be organized, **it's never been done.** Until the State Election Commission – the governor, attorney general and secretary of state – approve the Nov. 3 ballot, we're just making an educated guess about how it will look. As soon as there's an approved ballot, Initiative 42 friends will be informed about what to expect.

Q: What is Better Schools, Better Jobs?

A: It's a coalition of Mississippi public schools supporters and organizations, which know that our state and our school children cannot reach their potential without well funded educations.

Better Schools, Better Jobs seeks passage of Initiative 42, a constitutional amendment to require the Legislature **to keep the promise it made in 1997** to adequately fund our K-12 schools. Initiative 42 offers a phased-in method to reach full funding without any new taxes – to use new growth in the state's general fund to build K-12 resources and keep them there.

Nearly 200,000 Mississippians signed the Initiative 42 petition to place the amendment language on the Nov. 3, 2015 statewide ballot so that Mississippi's voters can decide whether they want their children's public schools adequately funded.

For more information, go to www.42ForBetterSchools.org or call (769)524-6818.