

# Mississippi is getting devices to every child. That's just the first step.

*For the first time in state history, every student in the state will have their own device, though hurdles remain in access to internet and connectivity*

By Kate Royals  
Mississippi Today

Nearly 400,000 MacBooks, Chromebooks, iPads and other devices are en route to students and teachers across Mississippi – a massive undertaking prompted by the state Legislature and implemented by the Mississippi Department of Education.

But in rural school districts where a rainstorm can disrupt internet connection, or students don't have connectivity even on a sunny day, a device is only the first of many hurdles.

State Superintendent of Education Carey Wright says ensuring students have adequate internet access and educators have the training they need will be a challenge, but the state has proven it can do extraordinary things in a crunch. They did so when they secured devices for all students and teachers in Mississippi – at the same time technology for distance learning was in high demand globally because of the pandemic.

In July, the Mississippi Legislature allocated \$200 million to help schools implement virtual learning both during and after the pandemic. In all, \$150 million will go toward helping schools purchase technology and devices, while the remaining \$50 million focuses on expanding broadband access in areas with little or none.

"I've talked to people around the nation, and there's not anyone doing something as detailed, as thorough, as coherent as what Mississippi



In a brief moment of concentration, Zen'Daiya examines her laptop before she returns to dancing throughout the classroom at the Boys and Girls Club Capitol Street unit on Sept. 21, 2020. (Photo by Mississippi Today/ Anna Wolfe)

is doing," said Wright in an interview with Mississippi Today.

Brent Engelman, director of education data and information systems at the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national organization comprised of the heads of state education departments, echoed Wright.

"Mississippi is among the states leading in the important equity work of closing the digital divide and ensuring students and teachers have what they need for digital learning," said Engelman. "Importantly, Mississippi has focused not just on devices and wireless access but also funding the curriculum and professional development needed to support this use of technology."

While it's important that students have the devices they need, the more im-

mediate mammoth challenge is making sure children have access to internet in an extremely rural and under-connected state.

And as many students and teachers wait on devices, the first semester of the school year is nearly halfway over. The divide between those with access to updated technology and those without has never been more apparent.

In Yazoo County School District, there were enough devices on hand for all of its 1,384 students to share a couple weeks into the school year – a best-case scenario for a school district that was not "one-to-one," meaning every student has a device. They placed an order for updated devices under the Equity in Distance Learning Act and, like most other districts, are still waiting on their delivery as of late Sep-

tember.

While they're waiting, the district is using the equipment it has, some of which is outdated. There was a lag for some teachers and students who had to familiarize themselves with the new learning management system and applications, in addition to the devices themselves.

Andrea Edgecombe is an interventionist for elementary schoolers at Bentonica Gibbs Elementary School in Yazoo County. After teaching for six years, she now works with small groups of students who are struggling academically.

This year, she has 14 virtual learners and 19 traditional students. The Yazoo County School District is implementing a hybrid model of school this year with the option for all-virtual learning.

While there have been

positives in her experience with distance learning – like making her own schedule so she can focus solely on the virtual learners during her morning hours, and the fact she and her students have access to devices – there are still challenges.

"There are lots of internet issues (on the part of the students), and lots of struggles with the younger kids and the schedule," she said. "They have a scheduled time to hop on Zoom with me every day, and I roughly have anywhere from five to 10 no shows a day depending on the day."

The issues include students being kicked off Zoom, excessive delays, and for some students who live in rural areas, a loss of internet when it rains.

Edgecombe, who also acts as the technology liaison at her school, said that while she's glad there have been new applications to try and accompanying professional development, there has not been any training on the devices themselves.

"There are some teachers who are not as familiar with not only our laptops but also the students' Chromebooks, so it's made it difficult for those teachers to answer questions from parents," she said. "In that same sense, it would've been great if we could have launched some sort of virtual town hall for parents to train them (as well)."

While Edgecombe is glad everyone will be receiving new devices with funds from the Equity in Distance Learning Act, there is a concern that when they do receive the new devices, there will be yet another learning curve to overcome.

"What's a little bit scary is when they do come out with these computers, what if they come in and they're different than what parents and kids are used to? Then we're going to have to re-teach everything," she said. "I'm hoping all our apps and programs work the same way on these new devices."

In nearby Holmes County Consolidated School District, the district is operating entirely virtually. All students received devices in August after the district placed an order using other Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds, and teachers had just been given new laptops the prior school year.

The district has done what it can to improve access for students – including putting hot spots in school buses and apartment complexes around the county for WiFi access at the beginning of the pandemic – but hurdles remain.

From weather-induced internet outages, attendance issues to some students' and caretakers' unfamiliarity with technology, Holmes County Central High School teachers Kristie Montgomery and Ravi Dutt both agree the virtual learning experience has been a challenge.

They've seen students logging on to class from cars or on front porches with borrowed WiFi.

Luckily, they said, students who miss virtual class usually show back up a day or two after the teacher calls the parent to let him or her know.

"I had a student who logged in to class while sitting in the backseat of a car. I asked why she was sitting in a car and she said, 'Mr. Dutt, there's nobody at home and

(Continued on page 12.)

## LISTEN IN

By Timothy E. Parker

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# LEGALS

**NOTICE OF SALE**  
CDE Storage, 109 E. Cedar Street, Durant, MS, will sell the contents of Unit #20 leased to Benjamin Ricks, 13647 Attala Road, Sallis, MS, on Saturday, November 7, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.

IN THE CHANCERY COURT OF HOLMES COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI  
IN THE MATTER OF THE HEIRSHIP OF MACK ARTHUR SIMPSON  
CHERYL REDMOND, PETITIONER  
CAUSE NO. 20-117

10-22,29b

SUMMONS  
(BY PUBLICATION)

**Legal Notice**  
Holmes Community College will receive sealed un-priced bid proposals for the purchase of (1) or More New 2021 52-Passenger Motor Coach Bus, Bid File 140, until 11:00 A.M. on Tuesday, November 10, 2020. Proposals will be submitted by sealed envelope to Holmes Community College, Purchasing Department, 9216 Highway 14, Goodman, MS 39079, or electronic submission at [www.centralbidding.com](http://www.centralbidding.com). All submissions will be evaluated and qualified vendors submitting compliant proposals will receive an invitation to participate in the reverse auction process. Bidding will be held by ELECTRONIC REVERSE AUCTION on Monday, November 16, 2020, commencing at 11:00 A.M. and ending at 11:30 A.M. CST. Vendors can register at [www.centralbidding.com/registration.php](http://www.centralbidding.com/registration.php). Bidders may download official documents from Central Bidding at [www.centralbidding.com](http://www.centralbidding.com). Any questions regarding this bid proposal should be directed to the Purchasing Office of the Goodman Campus at 662-472-9079. Any questions regarding the specifications should be directed to Sonny Sparks at 662-472-9015. For any questions relating to the electronic bids and reverse auction process, please contact Central Bidding at 1-225-810-4814. Holmes Community College reserves the right to extend the auction date if necessary to complete the pre-qualification process or amend the specifications. Holmes Community College reserves the right to reject any or all bids submitted, and to waive any and all informalities.

TO: ANY AND ALL UNKNOWN HEIRS AT LAW AND WRONGFUL DEATH BENEFICIARIES OF MACK ARTHUR SIMPSON, DECEASED  
You have been made a Respondent in the suit filed in this Court by Cheryl Redmond, Petitioner, seeking to determine the heirs and/or wrongful death beneficiaries of Mack Arthur Simpson, Deceased. Respondents other than you in this action are none.  
You are summoned to appear and defend against said petition on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. before the Honorable Robert George Clark III at the Holmes County Chancery Courthouse in Lexington, Mississippi. In case of your failure to appear and defend, a judgment will be entered against you for the money or other things demanded in the petition.  
You are not required to file an answer or other pleading, but you may do so if you desire.  
Issued under my hand and the seal of said Court, this 7<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2020.  
CHARLIE LUCKETT,  
(Seal) Chancery Clerk  
Holmes County, Mississippi  
By: /s/ Charlie Luckett, CC  
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