

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Office of the Governor



PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), the State Board of Education met on August 3, 2021, to determine whether there was sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District (“District”) that jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools of this District; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Accreditation, Mississippi Department of Education, presented information to the Commission on School Accreditation at its regularly scheduled meeting on August 2, 2021, regarding Holmes County Consolidated School District’s impairments related to findings of serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources, inappropriate standard of governance, and a continued pattern of poor academic performance; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), the Commission on School Accreditation found that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District due to findings related to serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources, inappropriate standards of governance, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate, which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools of this District, and which, without intervention by the State, could result in the continuation of an inadequate and unstable educational environment thereby denying the students of this District the opportunity to learn, to excel, and to obtain a free and appropriate public education; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education considered the information presented by the Office of Accreditation and the August 2, 2021, Resolution of the Commission on School Accreditation at its specially-called meeting on August 3, 2021; and

WHEREAS, following due deliberation and pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), the State Board of Education found that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District due to findings related to serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources and lack of internal controls, inappropriate standards of governance, inappropriate oversight by the local board, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to sustain a safe school climate, which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools of this District, and which, without intervention by the State, could result in the continuation of an inadequate and unstable educational environment thereby denying the students of this District the opportunity to learn, to excel, and to obtain a free and appropriate public education; and

WHEREAS, following due deliberation, the State Board of Education further found that Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(c)(vii), authorizes the State Board of Education to take such action as prescribed in Section 37-17-13, when a state of emergency is declared under Section 37-17-6(12)(b); that Section 37-17-13 provides that the State Board of Education may abolish the school district and its existing school board and superintendent of schools; and that Section 37-17-13 moreover provides that, at such time as the impairments have been substantially corrected, after a period of maintaining a “C” accountability rating for five (5) consecutive years, unless the State Board of Education determines that the district is eligible to return to local control in less than the five-year period, the State Board

of Education shall reconstitute, reorganize, or change or alter the appropriate governing authority of its action and request the election or appointment of school board members and a superintendent to govern the District in the manner provided by law; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-13, the State Board of Education, contingent upon the Proclamation of the Honorable Tate Reeves, Governor of the State of Mississippi, declaring a state of emergency voted to abolish the Holmes County Consolidated School District; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution adopted by the State Board of Education on August 3, 2021, a delivered to me, as Governor of the State of Mississippi, the State Board of Education requests that, pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), a State of Emergency be declared in the Holmes County Consolidated School District effective immediately in order to place the District under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education for the implementation of the applicable corrective actions provided for by Title 37, Chapter 17 of the Mississippi Code.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Tate Reeves, Governor of the State of Mississippi, after consideration of and in response to the Resolution and request of the State Board of Education, made under the authority of Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), and by virtue of the authority vested in me by Sections 116 and 123 of the Mississippi Constitution and Miss. Code Ann. Section 37-17-6(12)(b), do hereby issue this Proclamation to declare that, due to serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources and lack of internal controls, inappropriate standards of governance, inappropriate oversight by the local board, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to sustain a safe school climate which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools of this District, a state of extreme emergency exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Mississippi to be affixed.

DONE at the Capitol, in the City of Jackson, this the 5th day of August, in the year of our Lord, two thousand and twenty-one, and of the two hundred and forty-sixth year of the United States of America.

TATE REEVES
GOVERNOR
August 5, 2021
1:25 P.M.



BY THE GOVERNOR

MICHAEL WATSON
SECRETARY OF STATE

*Ex-school

(Continued from page 1.) had picked up in Cruger a 17-year-old female, who was a junior at the high school, and brought her to Leflore County to engage in sexual activity.

The Commonwealth reported at the time of Thomas’ arrest that he had a criminal history at previous schools where he had worked in Alabama.

He had been a principal at four high schools in that state and twice been convicted of misusing school funds for personal gain.

The Leflore County case against Thomas was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Amanda Sturniolo Langford.

“This has been one of the most egregious cases that I have worked on since starting with the District Attorney’s Office because of the Defendant’s blatant abuse of authority over a child that he was entrusted to educate,” Langford said in a prepared statement.

“While we cannot erase

*Dismantled

(Continued from page 1.) of the season or any type of post-season participation, according to the Mississippi Department of Education.

Cheerleading, drill and dance squads, speech and debate and other extracurricular

what happened, I hope that we have given the victim some closure. Without her and her family’s help and patience, we could not have been able to catch this predator and protect future stu

groups can participate in district and state contests but are ineligible to receive ratings.

Wilson, the interim superintendent, will remain there until the district reaches a grade of C or higher for five years; and the superintendent would work with district staff to correct all accreditation violations and raise student achievement.

Officials from the Mississippi Department of Education will meet with administration, faculty and staff from the district, then with parents and community leaders dur

ing a series of evening meetings.

A request for comment from Clarence Webster, the attorney for the lawsuit filed by former superintendent Debra Powell and school board members, was not immediately returned Thursday afternoon. Powell was also not immediately available for comment.

The state’s calls for a takeover of the district come following the release of a nearly 400-page investigative audit of the district that found it in violation of 81% of the state’s


accreditation standards. The audit also found violations of state and federal law, including nearly \$1 million of questioned federal expenditures.

The allegations include a dysfunctional school board and administration, improper spending, inaccurate record keeping and unlicensed

teachers in the classroom.

The state has placed a school district in a conservatorship 20 times since 1997; Holmes County is now the 21st.

Current Districts of Transformation, as they are referred to, include the Tunica and Noxubee County School Districts.



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