

Open Books, Open Minds! – Innovative Approaches to Literacy in McComb, Mississippi

McComb School District (MSD) serves nearly 3,000 students in a southwest Mississippi community of 13,337. 2010 census data indicate that 33% of McComb households have total income and benefits of [REDACTED] or less, and 2,090 of the 8,394 individuals over 25 years old have less than a high school diploma (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>). 100% of MSD students in Grades K-2 participate in the USDA school lunch program (*Children First Report*, www.msreportcard.com).

Of this year's 254 incoming Kindergarten children, 58% were not ready in terms of literacy according to McComb's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. Among the 107 Head Start attendees, 71% likewise did not come to Kindergarten with expected readiness skills. *Open Books, Open Minds!*, therefore, will stress early childhood literacy emphasizing school, parent, family, and community action to improve that statistic. The project will further impact literacy and reading skills through strategies appropriate to the entire K-12 population.

Project Priorities**Absolute Priority: (5 points)**

(a) MSD proposes childhood literacy activities and book distribution with emphases on (i) promoting early literacy and preparing young children to read and (ii) developing and improving students' reading ability. The project's approach is consistent with a volume of research and the National Reading Panel's 2000 report recommending instruction in five themes for K-2nd Grades: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension.

At the core of *Open Books, Open Minds!* is dialogic reading. In contrast to the typical scenario of a teacher reading aloud to a group of listening children – dialogic reading is about having fun conversations (dialogue) using the selected book as a springboard and capitalizing on

children's proclivity toward wanting a book read multiple times. At first, the teacher or parent might ask "what?" or "who?" when referring to pictures or main ideas. In the next part of this scaffolded approach, the conversation moves to more open-ended questions like "what do you see here" that allows the child to choose what they want to tell about. Finally, teachers might connect something about the book or story that links to the child's own experience or maybe make a connection between the current page and the beginning of the book, e.g. "well, do you remember what happened at the beginning of the story and why he is doing this?" Dialogic reading is not intended to replace other reading, but studies demonstrate that children who are exposed to the dialogic approach gained more vocabulary skills than children who don't get exposed to dialogic reading. Many studies included children who didn't get the dialogic reading – they got as much exposure to storybooks, but the differentiating factor was *how they were exposed to storybooks* (Lonigan, <http://dww.ed.gov>).

(b) Early childhood services will be provided for 2-year-olds through Grade 2.

(c) Key to this Priority are Project Goals 1 and 3: "To provide high-quality childhood literacy activities including meaningful opportunities for parental engagement," and "To improve access and utilization of high quality reading and reading readiness resources." Objectives 1.1, 1.2, and 3.3 address those goals.

Phase 1 – Training: (Oct – Nov, 2012) Head Start and Kindergarten teachers and reading mentors will be trained in dialogic reading. The Project Director and Outreach Coordinator will be responsible for scheduling training by Dr. Cathy Grace, Director of Early Childhood Development Policy at the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, DC and coordinating those events with Head Start and MSD Principals. Although shared reading is often a daily activity, teachers have not been trained in how to engage children in the conversations that research

shows has a statistically significant impact on oral language vocabulary acquisition. (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

Phase 2 – Classroom/Home Implementation and Book Distribution: (Nov, 2012) Community Mentors, most of whom are retired teachers, will be trained by the Project Director who is a certified “Read and Rise” and “Read.Excel.Achieve.Lead” (“R.E.A.L.”) trainer. In these research-based programs, Mentors model and coach parents of high-need children (ages 2-5) in a series of 6 sessions (“Read and Rise”), or reading on a weekly basis over a 7-month period to Grade 1-2 students in their classrooms (“R.E.A.L.”). Both include a book for parents or children to take home along with supporting materials with tips and related activities for parents; thus begins the habit of reading with the child and the acquisition of a home library – a key element considering that in low-income neighborhoods such as those in McComb, the ratio is 1 age-appropriate book for every 300 children (Neuman, 2006).

Phase 3 – Follow-up Training and Monitoring: (Dec, 2012 and ongoing) Full implementation of classroom and parent involvement programs will include monthly classroom observations by the Project Director, Principals, and/or Head Start Supervisors with post-observation feedback with the teacher. Logs completed by Head Start and MSD teachers will document the degree to which they utilize dialogic reading, and further training will be conducted.

(d) (i) The proposed project is supported by the cited study in which 114 **three- and four-year olds in a subsidized child care program were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (a) no treatment (control group), (b) a school condition in which children were read to by their teachers in small groups, (c) a home condition in which children were read to by their parents, and (d) a combined school plus home condition. Parents and teachers were trained in a special type of interactive reading.** After a 6-week intervention, “significant

effects of the reading intervention were obtained at posttest and were largest for children in conditions involving home reading” [emphases ours]. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on three posttest measures. The ANCOVA on the *Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test* (EOWPT) at posttest found a significant effect of intervention group, $F(3,79)=3.13$ at the .03 level of significance ($p=.03$). **The school-only group scored lower than both the school plus home group, $F(1,79)=7.62, p=.01$, and the home group, $F(1,79)=8.64, p=.005$.** (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). The U.S. Department of Education’s specifies as a Recommended Practice “Use Interactive and Dialogic Reading” and identifies Lonigan & Whitehurst’s research with Level of Evidence: Strong (<http://dww.ed.gov>).

McComb’s plan includes the training in and use of the dialogic type of shared-reading intervention studied by Lonigan and Whitehurst; the cited study evaluated 3- to 4-year old children from low-income families who attended subsidized child care, which is a subset of the early childhood group targeted in Goal 1 of the project. The logic of this approach is supported by Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998), who found that vocabulary growth is heavily influenced by the amount and variety of material children read; by Tannenbaum, Torgeson, and Wagner, (2006) who concluded that reading comprehension is impacted by the depth and breadth of the reader’s vocabulary; and Duke and Carlisle (2011), who determined that vocabulary, in particular, is very highly correlated with reading comprehension in the upper elementary years.

(ii) The name and citation for the supporting study relevant to the proposed project is as follows: Lonigan, C. J. & Whitehurst, G. J. (1998) Relative efficacy of parent and teacher involvement in a shared-reading intervention for preschool children from low-income backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13, 263-290.

Competitive Preference Priority 1 (5 points): The project will provide services to students and improve student achievement at two Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools: (1) McComb High School (Tier II, 2009), and (2) Kennedy Elementary School (now renamed Kennedy Early Childhood Center) identified as a Tier II school in FY2010. Both schools will benefit from updated and expanded library resources, including an array of technology such as new computer stations to replace badly outdated ones and a new web-based *myON* inventory of books which may be accessed at school, at home, and via eBooks. McComb High will have classroom libraries for the first time, and Kennedy will be the intensive focus of early childhood initiatives; teachers from both schools will be trained in media-related technologies and reading strategies.

Competitive Preference Priority 2 (5 points): MSD has sharpened its vision to encompass much-needed technology-based library tools and services. E-Readers will now be available for the first time, with the expectation of increased reading motivation similar to what happened in Pennsylvania, where gadget-centric low achievers upped their time spent in reading by 12.1% and self-reported reading 31.2% more books than the previous year (Engel-Unruh, 2010). New PC workstations for school libraries, *myON* licensing, eBooks, interactive books, play-aways, and CDs and DVDs for listening stations will be among the purchases. MSD technology staff will train library media specialists and teachers and assist them in setting up and implementing a system so library media specialists can collaborate with each teacher to select print and electronic media pertinent to current lesson plans and units.

Competitive Preference Priority 3: Improving Early Learning Outcomes (5 points) is the focus Goal 1, Objectives 1.1 and 1.2. Teacher training, parent training and involvement, book distribution, and dialogic reading activities are described in detail in the **Absolute Priority**.

(a) Significance (10 points)

(i) Building Local Capacity to Address the Needs of Target Population (5 points)

Training of faculty, library media specialists, and Head Start personnel will include initial and follow-up sessions throughout the 2-year implementation period. Coupled with monthly classroom observations, the reading readiness and reading skills development strategies will have become institutionalized over that time period with the result that any new staff members can be trained in an environment of full implementation. By 2014, K-12 faculty and library media specialists will have refined the system for identifying media needs on a weekly and routine basis. At least 15 retired teachers and other community volunteers will be trained, experienced, and ready to continue to serve in the mentoring capacity. Head Start and the MSD are partners in the community-wide Excel by 5 initiative to foster health, wellbeing, and development of children from Birth to 5; at present, McComb is a formal candidate for certification. Since both MSD and Head Start have already entered into Memorandums of Agreement for Excel by 5, the initiatives of the IAL program have broad support throughout the community and will be highly likely to continue as originally envisioned.

Perhaps most importantly, *Open Books, Open Minds!* will have nurtured at least 200 parents over the course of the grant period through ongoing “Read and Rise” and other training activities through the school district and Excel by 5. These parents and their children will be the beginning of a cohort who will begin Kindergarten with a higher degree of reading readiness than would otherwise be expected.

(ii) Development or Demonstration of Promising New Strategies (5 points)

To date, MSD’s experience is probably not unique in that “band-aids” have been applied at various grade levels or for small target populations. Among the features of Project *Open Books, Open Minds!* that have already been implemented to some degree are classroom libraries

in Grades K-6; “Read and Rise” and “R.E.A.L.” for one group of parents and two classrooms through 21st CCLC; and selection of supplementary reading materials for teachers by the library media specialist (a former teacher) at Otken Elementary. Technology acquisition and use has mostly been relegated to computer labs and classrooms; there are neither eReaders nor eBooks. What has been lacking, and what McComb School District intends to fulfill through this project, is a cohesive program that addresses all grade levels in its efforts to provide ready access to reading resources, implement a professional development plan that puts reading skills training at the forefront for pre-school through Grade 12, and assesses the combined effects of the initiative while evaluating both process and outcomes. Planners believe that this approach will improve reading achievement – that the total will exceed the sum of its parts. If this is the case, the project will have implications for other rural school districts where most children live in poverty (district-wide, 89% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch) and the majority (87.2%) are African American, 0.8% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian, 0.04% Native American, and 11.2% White.

(b) Quality of the Project Design (20 points)

(i) **Clearly Specified and Measurable Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes (5 points)**

MSD intends to nurture and improve literacy skills beginning with the City’s youngest citizens and continuing throughout their school careers. *Open Books, Open Minds!* goals with related objectives, which quantify expected outcomes, include the following:

GOAL 1: Improve reading readiness and early school success among high-need children.

Objective 1.1: Increase annually the percent of 3- and 4-year-old children who achieve gains in oral language skills beyond that expected according to chronological ages at pre/post DIBELS testing

Baseline: DIBELS results from August, 2012

Objective 1.2: Increase the number and percent of participating children who enter Kindergarten demonstrating reading readiness as measured by MSD's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment by at least 10% annually

Baseline: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results from August, 2012 (42% in Fall, 2011)

GOAL 2: Increase reading and language arts achievement among elementary and secondary participants.

Objective 2.1: Increase the percent of 3rd-grade students scoring Proficient or above on the Language Arts component of the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT2) by at least 5 percentage points annually

Baseline: 2011-12 MCT2 results (29%, 2010-2011 school year)

Objective 2.2: Increase the percent of 8th-grade students scoring Proficient or above on language arts component of the MCT2 by at least 5 percentage points annually

Baseline: 2011-2012 MCT2 results (46%, 2010-11 school year)

Objective 2.3: Increase the percent of high school students who score at the Proficient or above level in English II on the State Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) by at least 3 percentage points annually

Baseline: 2011-2012 SATP results (43%, 2010-11 school year)

GOAL 3: Improve access and utilization of high quality literacy resources.

Objective 3.1: Increase school library holdings of print and electronic media to at least 18:1

Baseline: 15.2:1 (July, 2012)

Objective 3.2: Ensure that, by the end of the grant period, every K-12 and Special Education classroom has a varied classroom library appropriate to a range of reading abilities and interests

Baseline: Classroom libraries lacking at Denman Junior High and McComb HS (July, 2012)

Objective 3.3: Increase annually the number of parents who self-report visiting the school or public library with their child/children as measured by a project-developed survey

Baseline: Pre-implementation survey to be completed by October, 2012

Overall outcomes include high-need parents trained to serve as first and best teachers for early learning; improved readiness among entering Kindergarteners; more students reading more and achieving on or above grade level; well-stocked libraries and classrooms that take into account cultural differences, special needs, and technology; trained teachers routinely using supplementary literature and informational texts; easy access to print and web-based reading; a higher graduation rate; and, students and parents and teachers who are a community of readers.

(ii) Coordination with Related Efforts and Other Resources (5 points)

In July, MSD was awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant that will provide a well-rounded slate of after-school and summer activities in collaboration with three local churches. In conjunction with an earlier 21st CCLC project, about 180 high-need students in Grades K-12 will receive tutoring assistance, participate in arts and recreational activities, and cultivate social responsibility. These activities support *Open Books, Open Minds!* project goals and library hours will be now be extended to better serve these and other students.

Excel by 5, funded through corporate and foundation sponsorship, was established to make early learning a community-wide priority and applicants must meet rigorous standards of planning and commitment. Parent training, beginning at birth, is a required component. A resource center, staffed by Junior League Volunteers, has been set up at the Kennedy Early Childhood Learning Center where parents may check out books, games, manipulatives, CDs, and DVDs to support age-appropriate development and early learning. Strong relationships have been built with the faith-based community, the housing authority, Head Start, and local agencies

which will facilitate project implementation. Strategies and training will be coordinated with federal programs such as Title I, in addition to project collaborators, in order to make the best use of funds and staff time (see letters of commitment and support).

Additionally, McComb is lead agent for two federal grants: the Teaching American History Grant to increase content knowledge among classroom teachers in Grades 5, 8, and 11; and a Library of Congress grant to familiarize faculty with the work of the Library of Congress, work with primary source documents, and integrate them with CCSS. In both cases, teachers' research skills will be sharpened and they will discover new instructional resources.

(iii) Effort to Improve Teaching and Learning, and Support Rigorous Standards (5 points)

Mississippi's adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) demands increased rigor and raised expectations for teaching and learning. CCSS for Reading/Language Arts are organized according to (1) Reading: Literature, (2) Reading: Informational Text, (3) Foundational Skills, (4) Writing, (5) Speaking and Listening, (6) Language, and (7) Range, Quality, and Complexity: Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality, and Range of Student Reading. The proposed project, Response to Intervention (RtI) (functioning as a universal learning design supporting students' diverse needs and progress), and CCSS will be mutually supportive through professional development, increased print and electronic reading resources, and shared expectations. McComb faculty will continue to participate in CCSS training sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and revise curricula accordingly through the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks.

(iv) Performance Feedback and Continuous Improvement as Integral to Design (5 points)

Key to continuous improvement is the use of an experienced External Evaluator who will provide quarterly feedback to project staff. The Project Advisory Committee will serve as an

Internal Evaluation Team, having ready access to data as well as formal and informal input from parents, teachers, students, and staff. The project is guided by goals and objectives that set annual improvement targets. Additionally, the web-based *MyON Reader* will allow classroom teachers to retrieve up-to-date lexile measures for students which may readily be compared to data in DIBELS and MAP assessments, which are currently in use at Head Start and MSD.

Quality of Project Services (25 points)

(i) Strategies to Ensure Equal Access for Underrepresented Groups (10 points)

McComb, at present, has no English Language Learners; however, MSD has selected resources such as “Read and Rise” that are available in Spanish as well as English. MDE staff are a resource for materials and bilingual individuals to assist if this situation arises.

Particularly pertinent to this project are considerations regarding race and gender. Language Arts scores on the MCT2 show consistent gaps between Male/Female and Black/White achievement. Males lag females by many as 19 points (Grade 7) and Blacks lag Whites by as many as 30 points (Grade 6) (<http://orsap.mde.k12.ms.us/MAARS>). Researchers who have explored the nationwide gender problem suggest that the remedy begins with appropriate text selection and choice; Wilhelm (2002) is among those observing that boys tend to choose reading that helps them connect with the real world. MSD will draw on research as well as recommendations from sources such as www.gettingboystoread.com, which posits that nonfiction (e.g., *Guinness World Records*), cars, sports, military, humor, action/adventure fiction, and comics are especially appealing. McGill-Fraznzen & Allington (2008) found that books about pop stars and comic book characters were preferred by 4th grade children of color. Struggling readers, and those with disabilities, also benefit from helping choose their reading and by being allowed to slow down their reading to implement compensatory strategies (Walczyk &

Griffth-Ross, 2007). Students with disabilities will benefit from the additional technology tools and resources. The *myON* digital library will allow access to more than 2,000 titles from school or home – a feature that will assist any home-bound students or physically disabled parents who want to read with their child. E-Readers and *myON* allow readers to enlarge the type size in the event of visual limitations. If Braille materials or adaptive devices are needed to enable full access and enjoyment of reading, those needs will be brought to the attention of project personnel who will arrange appropriate accommodations. Again, MSD will strive to include a wide variety of appealing print and digital media at a range of reading levels.

(ii) Services Appropriate to Needs of Intended Recipients or Beneficiaries (10 points)

Project services relate directly to the needs of our student and parent beneficiaries. MSD will, as described above in Section (i) select books and media to appeal to interests and preferences of all students, being mindful of a diverse student population who are 87% African American (*Children First Report* at www.msreportcard.com). Poverty (94% of students receive free- or reduced-price lunch according to www.msreportcard.com) drives the need to make books readily available and accessible at school, and to put books in the hands and shelves of high-need families, since in low-income neighborhoods there is typically 1 age-appropriate book for every 300 children (Neuman, 2006). “Read and Rise,” “R.E.A.L.,” and summer reading packs appropriately emphasize book distribution and early childhood intervention on behalf of parents who are often unfamiliar with the importance or methods of preparing children to read. Technology enhancements will both benefit and motivate.

(iii) Professional Development Leading to Improvements in Practice (5 points)

Three on-site training days each in Dialogic Reading (Dr. Cathy Grace of the Children’s Defense Fund and former Director of the Mississippi Institute for Early Childhood) and

Interactive Strategies for Library Personnel (Ms. Judy Card of First Regional Library) will be shared among MSD, Head Start, librarians, and others. Classroom observations and coaching, travel to annual International Reading Conferences, training in technology use by MSD technology staff, and training of community mentors provide a comprehensive and varied array of professional development activities involving practitioners at all levels to foster improvement in practice at Head Start, MSD, and at home. These activities will supplement MDE training in CCSS, the American History and Library of Congress grants, and district-sponsored training.

(d) Adequacy of Resources (10 points)

(i) Reasonableness of Costs Relative to the Objectives, Design, and Significance (5 points)

All proposed expenditures relate directly to the stated objectives and the associated activities. Supplies and Equipment, each item of which is vital to the meeting of the project objectives, account for the largest portion of the budget at [REDACTED]. Personnel emphasizes increased library hours and staffing along with parent and community work conducted by the Project Outreach Coordinator. Administration is shared between the Principal Investigator (a local contribution) and a half-time Project Director whose salary accounts for [REDACTED] of the total budget. Successful implementation of the project will generate findings that may have significant impact in terms of replication in other educational settings, particularly in situations with high poverty, geographic isolation, and a large percentage of minority students.

(ii) Reasonableness Relative to Number Served, Anticipated Results and Benefits (5 points)

The project cost is highly reasonable given that 3,200 children and students Age 2 through Grade 12 will be served each year, resulting in an average cost/youngster of [REDACTED] annually. That calculation does not take into account the 100+ parents, 190 faculty, 5 library media specialists, and staff of participating collaborators. The educationally and economically

disadvantaged nature of the population necessitates a comprehensive approach in order for it to yield expected results; budget decisions have been made in consideration of the value of outcomes and lasting benefits associated with this comprehensive initiative intended to improve school readiness, reading achievement, literacy resources, and parent involvement in learning.

(e) Quality of the Management Plan (20 points)

(i) Plan to Achieve Objectives On Time and Within Budget, Including Defined Responsibilities, Timelines, and Milestones for Accomplishing Project Tasks (10 points)

Common to all objectives are administrative and organizational tasks pertinent to program management and accountability. Among them are the following:

- Kick-off event for community sponsored by MSD and local partners (2012);
- Hiring procedures followed by MSD Central Office personnel (Oct, 2012);
- Contract procedures completed by Project Director, Superintendent, Board of Education (Oct, 2012);
- Baseline data documented from unobtrusive measures such as DIBELS, Kindergarten Readiness Test, Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT2), and Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) by External Evaluator (Oct, 2012); and
- Establishment of 11-member Project Advisory Committee (Internal Evaluation Team) by Principal Investigator and Project Director (Oct, 2012) for quarterly meetings.

Major project milestones, personnel responsible for implementation, targeted participants, and a timeline for accomplishment are included in the chart on the following page.

Objective(s)	Milestones	Persons Responsible	Participants	Timeline
1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2	Administration of surveys to establish qualitative data on a pre-implementation basis	External Evaluator, Project Director, Outreach Coordinator	Parents, Teachers, Project Partners	Oct – Nov., 2012
	Training in Dialogic reading	Dr. Cathy Grace	Head Start and K-2 Teachers	Oct, 2012; Aug, 2013
	Training in “Read and Rise” and “R.E.A.L.”	Project Director	Volunteer Mentors (Retired Teachers)	Nov, 2012; July, 2013
	Organization of 15 “Read and Rise” parent groups for 6 monthly sessions	Outreach Coordinator, Reading Mentors	Parents of High-Need Preschool Children	Dec, 2012; Sept, 2013
	Distribution of Summer Reading Packs	Outreach Coordinator	Completers of 4-year- old Head Start and K	June, 2012; June, 2013
1.1, 1.2, 2.1,	“R.E.A.L.” classroom mentoring and book distribution (7 monthly sessions)	Project Director, Reading Mentors	Students in 20 K-7 classrooms	Dec, 2012; Sept. 2013 (ongoing)
1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	Follow-up observations of classroom teachers in use of reading strategies	Project Director, Head Start Director, Principals	Head Start and K-12 Teachers	Dec, 2012 and quarterly

Objective(s)	Milestones	Persons Responsible	Participants	Timeline
1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3	Opportunities for signing up for public library cards	Project Director, Outreach Coordinator	Parents (pre-school – Grade 12)	Oct, Mar, Aug, annually
1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2	Purchase of print and electronic media for school libraries and classrooms	Project Director, Finance Manager	Library Media Specialists, Classroom Teachers	Dec, 2012; Oct, 2013
1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	Installation of new PCs at each school library	Project Director, MSD Technology Staff	Library Media Specialists	Jan, 2013
1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	Training in the use of state-wide Magnolia system, <i>myON Reader</i> , and access to web-based resources	Library Media Specialists,	K-12 Teachers	Jan – Feb, 2013; and ongoing
1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	Establishment of system and schedule for linking media to instruction	Library Media Specialists,	K-12 Teachers	Feb, 2013
1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2	Quarterly reporting and annual written report of performance indicators and project evaluation	External Evaluator	Principal Investigator, Project Director, Advisory Committee	Oct – Nov., 2012

All project staff and others involved in the project will carefully follow the plan described in this proposal. Responsibilities of key personnel are summarized in the chart below.

Responsibilities of Key Personnel	<i>Project Director</i>	<i>Outreach Coordinator</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Library Media Specs.</i>	<i>MSD Faculty</i>	<i>Head Start</i>	<i>MSD Technology Staff</i>	<i>Reading Mentors</i>	<i>Contracted Trainers</i>	<i>External Evaluator</i>	<i>Advisory Committee</i>
Administration	x										x
Dissemination	x	x				x				x	
Advisory Comm. Mtgs.	x	x								x	x
Parent Outreach		x				x		x			
Community Collaboration	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Training	x	x		x			x	x	x		
Technology	x	x		x	x	x	x				
“Read and Rise”	x	x						x			
“R.E.A.L.”	x	x						x			
Book Distribution	x	x		x	x			x			
In-School Reading				x	x	x		x			
Data Collection	x	x		x	x	x					x
Project Evaluation	x										x

Key district-level administrators are (1) Superintendent Therese Palmertree, who has 5 years experience in that position and is responsible for oversight and management of McComb *Open Books, Open Minds!*

School Districts and its programs under the direction of the McComb School District Board of Education, and (2) Curriculum and Federal Programs Director and proposed Principal Investigator Betty Wilson-McSwain, a doctoral candidate in Education Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi, who is also a seasoned professional with a range of leadership and classroom experience. Ms. Wilson-McSwain will lead the Project Advisory Committee, particularly in its role as the Internal Evaluation Team.

Ms. Linda “Rusty” Whittington has been identified as Project Director (0.5 FTE). She has managed two 21st CCLC grants with budgets totaling in excess of \$1.5 million during her tenure at McComb School District, the successful management and outcomes of which have contributed significantly to ongoing awards to serve different schools and grade levels with increasingly diverse and creative activities. Her responsibilities for IAL will include planning, staff supervision, purchasing, mentor training, classroom observations, collaboration with project partners and work with the external evaluator.

An Outreach Coordinator, Tomieka Butler, (1.0 FTE) will help identify and recruit parents of target children through referrals and assistance from the faith community, the McComb Housing Authority, and Head Start. She will coordinate mentoring and book distribution initiatives, and plan special activities for parents and families in collaboration with Title I, Excel by 5, Head Start, and local businesses.

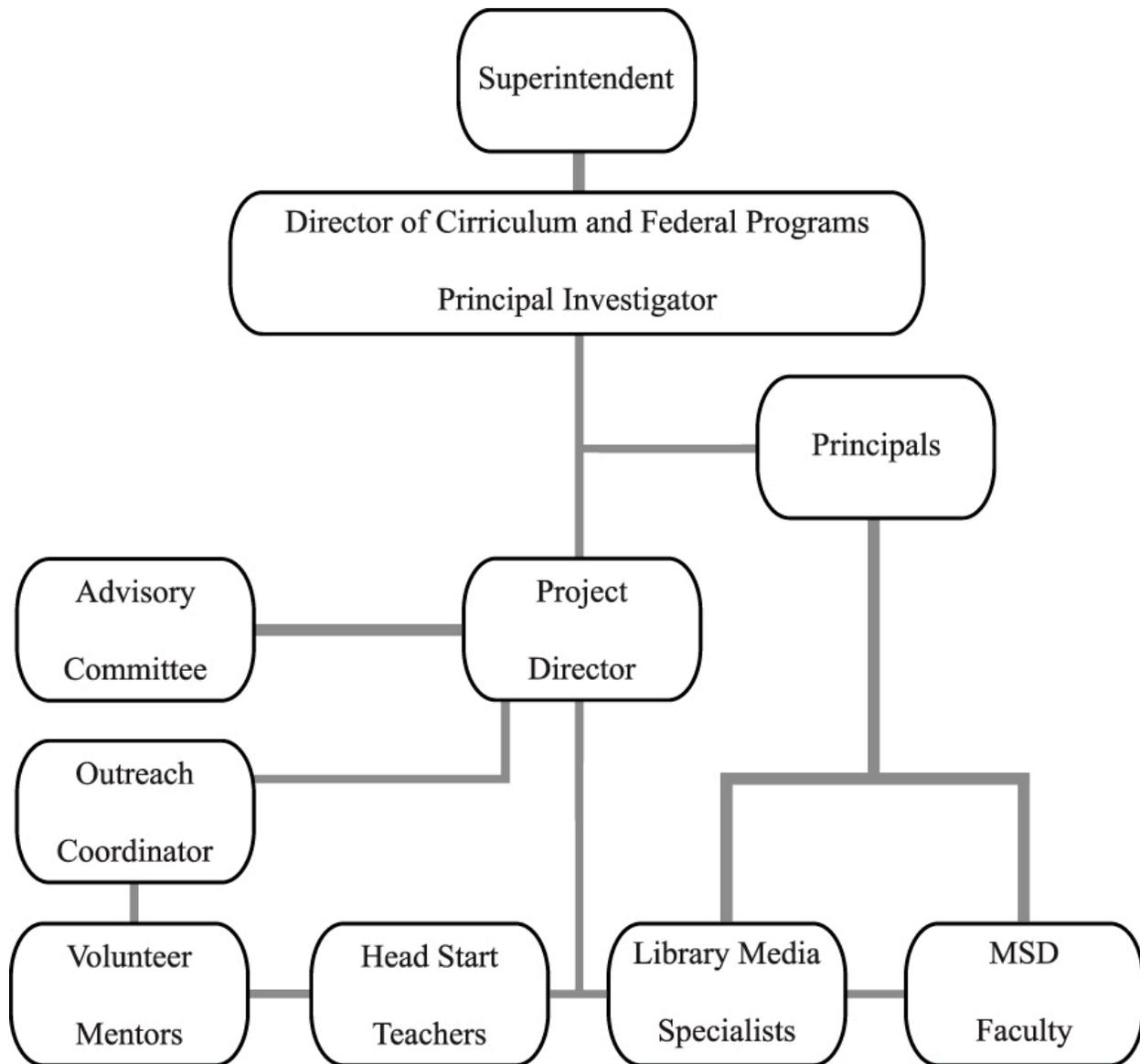
Open Books, Open Minds! Partners and Collaborators – Participating and supporting entities include the Barksdale Reading Institute, the Mississippi Department of Education, Pearl River Opportunities, Inc. (Head Start), McComb Housing Authority, the faith community, Excel by 5, and the Pike-Amite-Walthall (public) Library System.

An 11-member Project Advisory Committee will consist of eleven (11) members representing the project partners, faculty, parents, mentors, community members, and local government agencies. The Committee will meet quarterly, or more often as requested by the Project Director or Principal Investigator, and will serve as the Internal Evaluation Team.

Dr. Ann Beardshall will serve the project as External Evaluator. Data analysis, feedback to project, and reporting of qualitative and quantitative measures will be among her responsibilities in addition to identifying or developing surveys and meeting on at least a quarterly basis with project staff to provide feedback and make mid-course recommendations.

Volunteer Mentors for the “Read and Rise” and “R.E.A.L.” components will consist of community members, many of whom will be retired teachers, trained to work with parents and students. These have already been identified (see letter of support).

McComb’s K-12 Faculty, including Special Education Teachers will be actively involved in incorporating research-based reading strategies, print, and electronic media into instruction. School Library Media Specialists and Faculty will coordinate library resources with lesson plans and units of instruction; Lance et al (2007) found that elementary and middle school students took the initiative on a weekly or monthly basis to provide teachers with resources; high schools tended to have better test results when teachers reported that they initiate collaboration on the design and delivery of instruction. District technology staff, under the direction of Technology Coordinator Sue Jarvis, will help teachers and students learn new software and features of technology as well as assist the Library Media Specialists in setting up a system for the identification of print and electronic media for classroom teachers. Head Start Instructors, teachers of 3- and 4-year olds, will incorporate dialogic reading and other new strategies into reading readiness activities.



(ii) Appropriateness and Adequacy of Time Commitments of Key Personnel (5 points)

Ms. Wilson-McSwain will dedicate 15% of her time (an in-kind contribution) to oversight of the project in her role as Principal Investigator. She will lead the Advisory Committee in their role as the Internal Evaluation Team. Her responsibilities in the supervision of Curriculum and Federal Programs will result in effective coordination of Title I, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and professional development. A half-time position is appropriate

and adequate for the Project Director to manage the day-to-day operation and supervision of the project and its personnel. Because so much of the success of the project involves making and maintaining contacts with parents and local organizations such as churches and Head Start, the Outreach Coordinator will be a full-time position.

(iii) Adequacy of Mechanisms for Ensuring High-Quality Products and Services (5 points)

All hiring, purchasing, and contractual expenses will be handled according to state and district law and accepted best practices. Proposed project staff will work closely with District Finance Manager Cathy Jones as well as with the community organizations and agencies involved in the project – assets that will contribute to full implementation as well as fiscal and programmatic accountability. Trainers have been selected based on their credentials as well as the recommendations of respected colleague. Research has guided the identification of commercial products and will inform specific choices of print and electronic media for libraries and classrooms. The work of an External Evaluator and input from the Project Advisory Committee/Internal Evaluation Team will further ensure high-quality products and services.

(f) Quality of the Project Evaluation (15 points)

The purposes of the evaluation plan are (1) to determine the effectiveness of the project in improving students' reading readiness and achievement, (2) to support continuous improvement, and (3) to systematically provide concise answers to a series of questions related to expected outcomes and performance indicators; and (4) to inform project administrators, stakeholders, and parties interested in project replication.

(i) Use of Objective Performance Measures Clearly Related to Intended Outcomes and Resulting in Quantitative and Qualitative Data (10 points)

Several project objectives serve as outcome measures directly related to the IAL Performance Measures (1.1, 2.1., 2.2, and 2.3). These reflect priorities shared by READ and IAL and reflect the outcomes which MSD expects to meet as a result of project implementation. Benchmarks (milestones) with timelines are provided in the table on pages 14-15.

Research Questions

A series of questions, which relate closely to expected outcomes and performance indicators, will guide the evaluation:

1. How successful were strategies in increasing children's readiness for Kindergarten?
2. What was the impact of the project on reading achievement?
3. For which age and grade levels were strategies most successful?
4. To what extent did parents report positive results in using the in-home strategies they gained through the mentoring and training activities?
5. To which components of the project did students positively respond?
6. To what degree did teachers perceive changes in student reading behaviors in relation to improved reading achievement?
7. To what extent were community agencies and organizations constructively utilized to improve project services?

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Sources

Several existing and proposed resources of information will be included in the systematic collection of indications concerning project outcomes (1) unobtrusive measures including standardized state and local assessments of achievement in reading readiness (DIBELS, MAP, MSD Kindergarten Readiness Test) and reading/language arts achievement (MCT2, SATP); (2) survey results of self-reported data on classroom reading time, children's reading at home,

parental reading at home, and perceptions of teachers, parents, and students regarding amount and sources of reading and the relationship to enjoyment and increased achievement; (3) project records including number of parents and teachers having been trained, number of parents and students impacted by reading mentorship components; and (4) school documentation of library holdings, classroom libraries, and library media specialists' and teachers' collaboration in the identification and utilization of media corresponding to lesson plans and/or units.

Data Collection and Analysis

A variety of methods will be used to gather data. Pre-, post and intermediate scores from early childhood, Kindergarten readiness, and state achievement tests will be compiled from results in August, January, and April; gap analysis will be utilized to determine gains, including information by subgroups including race, gender, disability, and economic disadvantage where feasible. Frequent surveys, containing both closed-ended items and open-ended questions, to be developed upon project will be directed at students, parents, teachers, library media specialists, and project collaborators on a pre-post basis and following training or other project activities with results compiled for review on a quarterly basis. Activity and training logs will be completed by staff, library media specialists, technology interns, and mentors for project documentation and quarterly review of time and effort and progress toward meeting milestones such as number of parents trained and the number of books distributed to high-need students/parents as a component of process evaluation and opportunity for feedback to the project. Inventories of school library holdings and circulations by school will be monitored through MSD's Destiny automated card catalog and inventory system and compared semi-annually to target levels. Quarterly formal and informal classroom observations by project staff, Head Start personnel, Principals, and the Advisory Committee will be documented by a project-

developed feedback instrument. Additionally, to the degree practical, an effort will be made during and beyond the grant period to follow up on participating students' school experience in subsequent years.

(ii) Evaluation to Provide Performance Feedback and Periodic Assessment (5 points)

As indicated by the letter included in the attachments, Dr. Ann Beardshall has agreed to serve as the External Evaluator. With more than 20 years' experience in program evaluation, including extensive work with McComb School District, she is highly qualified to provide these services (see Resume). Included in her responsibilities are quarterly meetings with project and MSD staff to review preliminary data and provide feedback on process and outcomes. Data to be collected through the project will also provide ongoing indications of effectiveness.

Throughout the evaluation, ongoing communication and feedback will be used to enable mid-course corrections.

Reports and Results

Annual performance reports will be prepared for submission to the U.S. Department of Education by November of each year. Interim reports will be made available quarterly for the benefit of project administrators and the Advisory Committee. Not only will the evaluation provide accountability information and help guide implementation, but also the results will provide information about outcomes and strategies that will be useful to other school districts who may want to replicate the project.

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