



Thank you Tupelo  
Community for helping



become a  
District of Innovation

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### **TPSD Awarded District Of Innovation Distinction**

**TUPELO, Miss.** — In the midst of unparalleled uncertainties regarding education due to COVID-19, the Tupelo Public School District received some highly-anticipated news Thursday morning when it was named a District of Innovation.

The 18-month process, led by Innovative Program Facilitator Stewart McMillan, was officially finalized during the Mississippi Board of Education’s meeting in Jackson with a unanimous vote.

This coveted distinction, which was also awarded to Rankin County, allows TPSD to outline how it will support college and career readiness from Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

“Our District of Innovation process at its core focused on identifying the greatest needs of our community and finding innovative ways to meet these needs,” McMillan said. “It is validating to receive this status from the State Board of Education, and I look forward to the community and district staff continually committing to our focus on making sure all students are college and career ready.”

The core plan tenets are emphasizing career opportunities at three levels.

For the lower elementary schools, the central focus is career fairs and Project Lead the Way. At the middle school, it’s career exploration with targeted programs for subgroups of students (EL, over age/under credited, and students on the edge of proficiency) and Project Lead the Way (PLTW). At the high school level, it’s career enhancement with accelerated opportunities such as Middle College, Project SEARCH and future Career Academies.

During the 2019-20 academic year, TPSD successfully launched, PLTW, the Middle College (a joint partnership with Itawamba Community College) and Project SEARCH in collaboration with the North Mississippi Medical Center and the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services.

“As a parent of one and soon to be two children that will be TPSD students, the District of Innovation status gives me confidence in our community commitment to innovation and

college and career readiness,” McMillan added. “Our process exemplified the best of our community where people came together to actively discuss and participate in dialogue to support our most valuable asset, our students.”

This intense and complex process was fueled outside the classroom with 14 community meetings seeking input and needs assessments from nearly 900 people. The data received, along with various surveys, was thoroughly analyzed and became the thesis of the application.

“I want to begin by thanking our amazing community who participated in this process in focus group meetings, by survey, and with letters of support,” TPSD Superintendent Dr. Rob Picou said. “I also want to thank all of our educators who participated in this process and the District of Innovation Advisory Board. Finally, I want to thank Stewart McMillian for her tireless efforts in organizing the process and writing the application. We would not have this designation without her focus and determination.

“We are looking forward to working with our partners at the Mississippi Department of Education to design exciting and innovative learning opportunities for all students. The designation as a District of Innovation is a perfect example of the Tupelo Spirit and the One Single Heartbeat. People came together, focused their attention on what is possible, and is now ready to achieve uncommon results.”

TPSD is now one of 10 districts in Mississippi with this designation, joining Baldwin, Booneville, Corinth, Hinds, Grenada, Gulfport, Hinds, Oxford, Rankin and Vicksburg-Warren.

Legislation was passed in 2015 allowing districts to apply for this status, enabling those granted to request exemptions from certain state regulations to improve student achievement.

“I want to thank every student, parent, community member and TPSD staff member who has been a part of this process,” McMillan said. “This status validates our collective community commitment to make decisions in the best interest of students and to work to find more authentic ways to make sure all students are college and career ready.”

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