

Gov. Winter Inspires Teacher Corps

Over the last 15 years, more than 300 have answered the call. Their charge: teach in some of the most challenging public schools in Mississippi.

Based at the University of Mississippi, the Mississippi Teacher Corps is a two-year alternative teaching certification program. Since its formation in 1989, the MTC has placed participants in teacher shortage areas in exchange for free tuition to earn master's degrees, impacting an estimated 60,000 public school children.

To honor their commitment and sacrifice, Ole Miss hosted a reunion for the MTC participants in July. The two-day event was highlighted with an inspirational keynote address by former Gov. William Winter.

"I appreciate the commitment you have toward improving the quality of education in our state," Winter says. "Mississippi is a better state, and the nation will be a better country because of what you have done."

Considered to be the state's education governor, Winter's Education Reform Act of 1982 set the stage for the creation of MTC. Before then, an alternate teacher certification program didn't exist in Mississippi.

"Governor Winter is widely acknowledged as one of the most progressive education governors in the South and in the country," says Ben Guest, MTC program coordinator.

Nearly a third of Mississippi's 82 counties, mostly in the Delta, require additional teachers. Without non-traditional forms of teacher placement programs such as the MTC, public school students in these areas would not receive a quality education.

Despite the successes of education across Mississippi over the last 40 years, Winter says much more needs to be done, and he left the teachers with a specific obligation.

"Hope in Mississippi has almost died, and we can't afford to let that happen," he says. "It only takes one teacher to give a child hope. You can open doors for children and allow them to serve their fellow human beings. You can give a generation of Mississippians the spark that's needed to allow our state to reach new heights."