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# City of Oxford, Lafayette County could help guide reading initiative

Posted on November 30, 2016 by Emma Crawford in Education, News



TOLLISON

By Emma Crawford Kent

Daily Journal

OXFORD – With Tuesday’s announcement that Mississippi will become a Campaign for Grade-Level Reading State, the Oxford-Lafayette County community could serve as an example for the initiative’s push to create reading-centric communities across the state.

The Mississippi Department of Education announced the statewide initiative Tuesday morning in Jackson.

Oxford-Lafayette County is one of two communities in Mississippi already designated a Campaign for Grade-Level Reading community. Gulfport is the other.

Campaign for Grade-Level reading is a collaborative effort across the nation to ensure more children in low-income families succeed in school and beyond.

Participating communities work together to create action plans for reading success that focus on school readiness, attendance, summer learning and third-grade reading.

The community effort in Oxford and Lafayette County is fairly new, but pre-existing efforts to promote literacy have helped get the initiative off the ground.

Senate House Education Committee Chairman Gray Tollison, R-Oxford, said in Oxford, and in other communities that will participate, the work lies in coordinating the activities of different reading and education advocacy groups.

“What the grade-level reading community can do is coordinate the activities of these different groups,” Tollison said. “So instead of being separate silos, they can partner and pool the resources they have and make sure they’re reaching maximum effectiveness in the different areas that the campaign works on.”

Tollison cited “Horizons,” a program at the University of Mississippi that allows at-risk children from Oxford and Lafayette County to take summer classes on campus while at the same time learning to swim, as an example of a program that could be established in other grade-level reading communities as they are developed through the statewide initiative.

According to Tollison, the Oxford and Lafayette County school districts have really embraced the attendance component of the initiative at their schools by incentivizing student attendance.

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Another program, called Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), helped schools give free books to first grade students at the end of the school year. The program is designed to keep students reading during the summer.

Tollison said he believes, without a doubt, the coming together of efforts like these has already made a positive impact on the children of Oxford and Lafayette County.

"Little things like that make a big difference," Tollison said.

Tupelo, New Albany and Corinth are other Northeast Mississippi communities Tollison said he hopes to see jump on board with the initiative.

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