

# Jackson, MS

## Mayor Harvey Johnson, Jr.

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### ***Youth Entrepreneurship As Small Business Development***

Economic and business development are often defined in terms of starting a business or supporting existing business. Seldom does one consider the development of small business people themselves as small business development.

The City of Jackson, MS has developed a Youth Entrepreneurship Program that is designed specifically to encourage small business development and leaders. The Program involves 52 students ages 12-16 years old, from one middle school and one high school. Both schools are located in the Enterprise Community, the most impoverished area of the City.

All students participating in the Program were identified by the teachers and principals of the schools and are identified as "at risk". With the largest proportion of students dropping out of school at the 9th grade, the Youth Entrepreneurship Program was developed to offer a transitional opportunity between middle and high school. Students enter the program at grades 7 or 8, and 9, and are followed for at least two years. The Program is expected to give students the motivation to stay in school and the vision and opportunity to succeed.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Program is an extraordinary partnership of Jackson Public Schools, the City of Jackson, 15 business leaders and small business owners, parents, and retired teachers. Using a curriculum called "Kids Way", which was modified to meet the particular needs of the group, young people receive one hour of training, two days a week, as part of the regular curriculum in their school. An outside trainer provides the instruction, working together with a core subject area teacher to relate instruction to other classroom work, thereby reinforcing that work. Core subject teachers provide detailed input in assessing student progress. Retired teachers are also used on a quarterly basis to assess progress.

Parents are encouraged to be actively involved through attendance at parent meetings, which are held quarterly. At the first parent meeting, 17 out of 25 parents partici-

pated, a much higher number than normal for parent participation at these schools. Those attending were actively engaged and seemed excited about the opportunity their children have to learn what it means to own and manage a business.

The Entrepreneurship curriculum covers all aspects of business, including the basics of business etiquette, student self-esteem and appearance. The following topics and activities give a sense of the breadth and depth of the Program: introduction to the concept of owning and operating a business; discussion of business events in the news; writing activities in which students are encouraged to describe dreams about their future; workgroup exercises and discussions of what a business does and definitions and character traits of an entrepreneur; business communication; conducting research through use of the Internet; marketing; and public speaking.



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***"The Youth Entrepreneurship Program provides the seeds that will help grow small business in Jackson over the next several years. I am very proud of the Program and of the young people who are so enthusiastically involved."***

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Program has been running nine months

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