

PARENTS AND TEACHERS KNOW

## *the Arts Are Not Just About the Arts*

In Jackson Public Schools, 30% of students do not graduate from high school. All of these students could graduate if teachers and parents were able to reengage disengaged students in learning.

The arts are one of the most effective and efficient ways to both reach struggling students and deepen learning for successful students. John Howell, Arts Facilitator at Casey Elementary said, "The arts are the best way to reach all students because they incorporate many styles of learning."

Students who learn kinesthetically can learn the water cycle through movement and through the characters of Shakespeare. Students who learn musically can learn metaphors through song writing. Students who learn

linguistically can learn paraphrasing through story telling. And students who learn spatially, can learn measurement and math through mosaics.

Using both Shakespearean dialogue and modern English, teachers at Casey Elementary School use the story and characters to teach new words, how to summarize scenes, write descriptive passages scenes and to teach metaphors and similes. It turns out that Shakespeare is not just about teaching human universal themes but about teaching basic academic skills.

Ask for More Arts teachers throughout JPS are having great success in using the arts to reach all learning styles in their classrooms. And PPSJ Parent Leadership

Institute graduates are supporting different learning styles at home and at school.

In 2007, the Casey Elementary Principal asked PLI graduate, Julie Owen, to present what she had learned about learning styles

primary learning styles and examples of how the arts can be used to meet a variety of learning styles. At Casey, teachers don't just learn about differentiated instruction (learning styles), Casey students take the



in the Institute to Casey teachers as part of their back-to-school professional development. Owen and fellow PLI graduate, Venetia Miller, created a learning styles inventory for children which they also shared with teachers. The inventory workshop gave teachers tools for identifying

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ABOVE: JPS students view self-portraits in the style of Picasso by Davis Elementary School 3rd graders during a field trip to the Ask for More Arts Residency Exhibit.

# Parent Leadership Institute: Jackson Graduates Deepen their Learning by Coaching Other Parents

After ten years of school reform work, Parents for Public Schools of Jackson has learned that real sustainable change comes from the ground up and involves the entire school community. PPSJ's proven success attracted attention from the Center for Education Innovation (MSCED). The Center approached PPSJ about helping engage local people in underserved Mississippi Delta communities in turning around low-performing schools. These districts include Benoit, Humphreys County, North Bolivar, West Bolivar, and West Tallahatchie.

Through a series of community learning sessions, parent leaders trained through PPSJ's Leadership Institute are empowering principals, teachers, and parents in Delta



communities with information, training, and support for identifying their specific challenges and developing local solutions. Already barriers to positive working relationships between teachers and parents are tumbling down.

For the first time ever in Benoit School District, educators and parents are working together to review school data and accountability standards, forming questions, and developing answers to help improve their schools and student performance. For example, parents identified a barrier to student success when they realized 10th grade students were taking three subject area tests in one year and there was no ACT prep course offered to seniors. As a result of PPSJ involvement and the work of committed parents in the district, tested subjects are now spread over multi-years and a new ACT prep course is being offered to seniors.

In North Bolivar, parents created a District Advisory Council which ultimately led to parents and community members having representation and a voice on the district's superintendent search committee. After one event, community leader Jane Letchworth said, "Last night's PPSJ meeting proves to me that we are making progress. The sense of empowerment in the room was tangible. Forming our District Learning Community Advisory Council to increase parent and community engagement is a major accomplishment."

Other parents from North Bolivar shared similar responses on the impact of PPSJ programs:

*"I gave my child the learning styles inventory and found out he learns best with music playing in the background. So now I can't ask him to turn off the music when he is studying."*

*"I now know that school board meetings are not only for angry parents. I need to attend the school board meetings and listen!"*

*"I now know that the numbers on the district report card and the MS Children's First Act Report mean something. The PPSJ data workshops helped me make sense of the school and district data. Now I can talk to my child's teacher and principal and help other parents because I have more knowledge."*

Families and communities are equipped to do this work because of training and consulting offered by PPSJ over the last year in partnership with the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation.

Parents who feel informed and empowered to participate in leadership decisions are the same parents who understand academic goals, testing procedures, and how to secure needed resources for their children. PPSJ helps people empower themselves, to

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learning inventory so that teachers understand how each child in their classrooms learns best and students begin to understand their own learning style. Now this practice is being used regularly in other JPS Ask for More Arts schools.

How do we know arts learning is working? We are seeing test scores rise, classroom behaviors improve, and students more engaged in learning. And teachers and parents report that the arts bring life back into test driven classrooms.

We know all kids can learn. We know we need new tools to improve learning. And we know the arts are one of the most cost effective and far reaching tools to meet this challenge.

As John Howell remarked, "PPSJ has provided an invaluable resource to us through the Ask for More Arts program. They have validated our own beliefs in the value of arts driven education and helped us share our beliefs and practices within our school district and our community. We are not alone in this anymore."

Parents for Public Schools of Jackson is bringing this tool to Jackson Public School classrooms in the form of teacher training, artist residencies in schools, and student exhibitions. In fact, one teacher recently said that despite a better job offer in another district, she wanted to remain in Jackson Public Schools because of the strength of this arts program. She knows it has changed her teaching and she knows it has changed her students. ■

understand how they can productively effect change, and to create the public will to take action. We build capacity that will last over time and can respond to the ever-changing landscape in our public schools. That is what PPSJ is all about - building solution oriented communities to ensure that no child in Mississippi gets left behind. ■

PHOTO: Members of the Benoit community gather monthly to work with PPSJ staff



## PPSJ Selected as Program Partner for National Initiative

Last fall, PPSJ was chosen as a partner in Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER), a national initiative that supports education change through grants and technical assistance to community organizations in six states across the country. Mississippi CPER is dedicated to achieving education equity which means every Mississippi child will have the quality teaching and learning and support services needed to be successful. Our work is about reforming current policies and practices at the local and state levels that perpetuate educational inequities and ensuring that community-based leaders and parents can secure the resources needed to affect positive change and expand the public will to support the education of all children. Other CPER partners include Southern Echo, Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi First, Mississippi NAACP, and The Young People's Project.

What does this work mean for day to day change in local schools? It means that PPSJ is giving parents a strong voice in shaping the policies that affect public schools. It means that PPSJ is helping parents understand and identify healthy schools, how schools are financed, how to measure accountability, how to access resources, how to recruit, secure, and retain highly effective teachers. And finally, it means PPSJ is engaging parents, students, and the community in reforming ineffective schools.

Information is empowering to all communities. PPSJ is providing resources to empower local communities to demand and deliver quality education for all children. ■

# "BEYOND THE BRICKS"

*Documentary in Jackson*

This past spring, PPSJ, in partnership with Fathers Active in Their Hoods, Inc. (FAITH) and the Young People's Project (YPP), convened Jackson citizens for multiple presentations of a Ford Foundation (NY) sponsored documentary titled *Beyond the Bricks*. The documentary highlights the consistently low performance of black males in school through the stories and words of students from Newark, N.J. together with national leaders and experts who are working to address this problem. During the first screening, a panel of community leaders led the audience in a discussion on how the documentary relates to challenges in Mississippi. The panel included Tiffany Barner, 2010 Parent Leadership Institute graduate, Cassio Batteast, FAITH, Dr. Earl Watkins, Mississippi NAACP and Foundation for the Mid South,

gap in graduation rates between black males and white counterparts. In 2007-08, the graduation rate in Mississippi for African-American males was 46%.

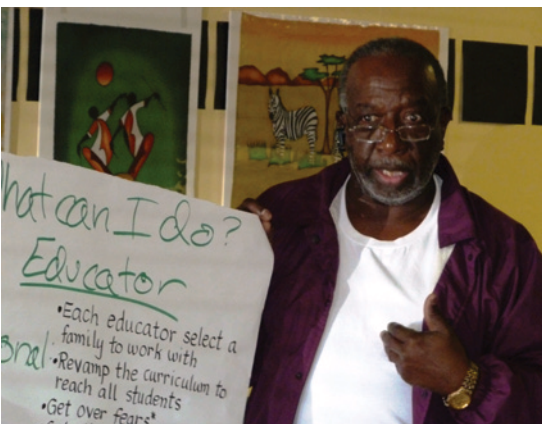
### *Nationally and locally, we know some of the factors that can change the lives of African-American males:*

- Engaged parents who help students with homework, who are comfortable talking with teachers and who encourage their children to do well.
- Teachers who know all of their students, believe all children can learn, and teach to reach all children.
- School environments where students feel safe, nurtured, motivated, and supported.
- Communities that support the broader needs of children so they can devote time at school to learning.
- Mentors who inspire young men to graduate prepared for college or career.

Through each of our signature programs - The Parent Leadership Institute, the Ask for More Collaborative, and Ask for More Arts - PPSJ is working to create schools that are welcoming, engaging, and providing overall learning environments that assure all children a quality education. ■

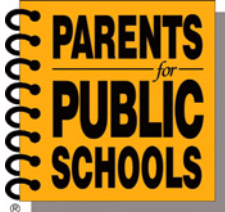
TOP: *Beyond the Bricks* attracted a large audience for viewing and discussion.

CENTER: *Following the film screening, parents, educators, advocates, and youth worked in teams to discuss what each group could do to improve education outcomes for students.*



and Alonte Davis-Anderson, JPS High School student.

Town Hall events have been held in nine other communities across the country where graduation rates for black males is chronically low. Nationwide there is a 28%



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**Parents for Public Schools  
of Greater Jackson**

200 North Congress St,  
Suite 500  
Jackson, MS 39201

**PPSJ OFFICERS:**

Craig Gill, *President*  
Tim Rush, *Vice President*  
Lee Harper, *Treasurer*  
Dedria Haguewood, *Secretary*  
Susan Womack, *Executive Director*

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# Quality Education Means *Hopeful Futures*



**N**early 200 people gathered at the MS Arts Center for the second annual Evening of Hope, a fund

raising event to benefit PPSJ's Ask for More Arts program. An Evening of Hope is the brainchild of Jackson artist, Nicole Marquez, who wanted to give something back in appreciation for the community-wide support she and her family received following a near-fatal accident in 2008. Marquez chose Ask for More Arts to be the beneficiary of this event because she understands the importance of arts learning in schools and wants to help give children in Jackson Public Schools a quality education that includes the arts.

International jazz performing artist and Jackson native, Cassandra Wilson, joined PPSJ staff, Susan Womack, Neola Young, and Carolyn Jolivet to hear Rhonda Richmond perform at Evening of Hope.



Jazz artist Rhonda Richmond performed for an audience of nearly 200 school, business, and community leaders at Evening of Hope.

The 2011 event featured entertainment by jazz artist, Rhonda Richmond, who also served as an artist in residence at Sykes Elementary School as part of the Ask for More Arts residency program. ■

Jackson native, Nicole Marquez, welcomed guests to the second annual Evening of Hope.

