By: Representatives Frierson, Brown, Clarke, Eads, Holloway, Lott, Mayo, Myers, Warren, Whittington

HOUSE BILL NO. 859

AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO CONDUCT A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF ESTABLISHING PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT THE STATE; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO CONDUCT A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTING MANDATORY KINDERGARTEN THROUGHOUT THE STATE; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO STUDY THE FEASIBILITY OF DEVELOPING AN OPTIONAL GRADUATION DIPLOMA TO BE KNOWN AS AN OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO REPORT ANNUALLY TO THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE ON CERTAIN COHORT GROUPS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. The State Department of Education shall:

(a) Conduct a total needs assessment of the state to determine what areas currently lack pre-kindergarten programs and services, and conduct a cost-benefit analysis of establishing pre-kindergarten programs on a statewide basis. Any expected costs, whether federal, state or local, associated with implementing this requirement shall be clearly outlined; and

(b) Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of implementing mandatory kindergarten on a statewide basis. Any expected costs, whether federal, state or local, associated with implementing this requirement shall be clearly outlined; and

(c) Study the feasibility of developing an optional graduation diploma, to be known as an occupational diploma, that would include course requirements to ensure that students have mastered skills and employment competencies. The study shall include proposed procedures for ensuring that students may select and move between courses of study leading to a standard high school diploma or an occupational diploma. The study shall include options for continued skills training through community colleges, which shall include agreements between school districts
and community colleges to minimize the circumstances under which students must repeat successfully completed high school coursework in community college. Any expected costs, both federal and state, associated in implementing these requirements shall be clearly outlined; and

(d) Report annually to the Mississippi Legislature on the graduation and dropout rates based on Grades 7 through 12 and Grades 9 through 12 cohort groups, statewide and by district.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2003.