

By: Representative Scott

To: Education;
Appropriations A

HOUSE BILL NO. 323

1 AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN
2 CONJUNCTION WITH THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE INSTITUTIONS OF
3 HIGHER LEARNING AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO ESTABLISH
4 AND IMPLEMENT THE "AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE SUCCESS ACADEMY" FOR
5 PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 8; TO PROVIDE
6 THAT THE ACADEMY SHALL ASSIST PRACTITIONERS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL
7 LEADERS TO RECOGNIZE TO UNDERSTAND AND CULTIVATE THE DIVERSITY OF
8 SOCIAL SKILLS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS OF YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE
9 STUDENTS IN THE EARLY GRADES THROUGH A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND
10 STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION; TO REQUIRE THE ACADEMY TO
11 BE STRUCTURED AS A ONE SEMESTER COURSE OF INSTRUCTION THAT IS AGE
12 AND GRADE APPROPRIATE FOR PARTICIPATING STUDENTS IN THE APPLICABLE
13 GRADES; TO PRESCRIBE THE MINIMUM INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENTS REQUIRED
14 TO BE TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY; TO REQUIRE PARTICIPATING STUDENTS TO
15 COMPLETE A SERIES OF TASKS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE THEIR ACADEMIC AND
16 SOCIAL ABILITIES; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

17 WHEREAS, studies have shown that youth imprisonment
18 correlates to a host of negative consequences both while
19 incarcerated and after incarceration as they eventually attempt to
20 reenter society; and

21 WHEREAS, since fiscal year 2007, African-American youths have
22 accounted for nearly 85% of all youth prison admissions in
23 Mississippi, a racial disparity that continues to persist despite
24 the decline of prison admissions for people under age 18; and



25 WHEREAS, according to November 2021 data from the Mississippi
26 Department of Corrections (MDOC), 1,181 people incarcerated in
27 Mississippi prisons were arrested and detained before age 18,
28 which represents roughly 1 out of every 14 incarcerations; and

29 WHEREAS, the average sentence for youth MDOC admissions over
30 the last five fiscal years is 8.6 years, with various kinds of
31 burglary as the most common offense; and

32 WHEREAS, in addition to the inappropriateness of juvenile
33 long-term sentencing, the state must also account for the
34 financial cost of extended incarceration, averaging a daily cost
35 of \$50.63 which, in annual totality of \$18,480.00, exceeds the
36 annual in-state tuition cost at Ole Miss and Mississippi State
37 University combined, which is estimated at \$18,044.00; and

38 WHEREAS, incarcerating youth has been proven to have many
39 consequences, including an increased likelihood of recidivism
40 after release, exacerbation of mental illnesses, and less success
41 with educational achievement and gainful employment; and

42 WHEREAS, youth incarcerated in adult prisons are twice as
43 likely to be beaten by prison staff, five times more likely to be
44 sexually assaulted and 36 times more likely to attempt suicide
45 compared to youths detained in more age-appropriate environments;
46 and

47 WHEREAS, the 68 people in Mississippi who were arrested as
48 juveniles and have served at least 20 years in prison costs the
49 state in excess of \$1.2 million each year of incarcerating, which



such costs could be realized as savings to be reinvested into anti-recidivism efforts such as job training, educational courses and support counseling if the state acted to expand parole eligibility for this small portion of the prison population; and

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the Mississippi Legislature to promote successful educational, civic and quality of life outcomes for its citizens, regardless of ethnicity or gender, by recognizing and taking the necessary steps to make sound policy decisions to eradicate the grave disparities that exist within health, educational, correctional and judicial systems: NOW, THEREFORE,

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

SECTION 1. (1) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, the State Department of Education, in conjunction with the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning and the Department of Human Services shall establish and implement a program known as the "African-American Male Success Academy" for public school students in kindergarten through Grade 8. In addition to assisting practitioners, teachers and school leaders to recognize, understand, and cultivate the diversity of social skills and school success of young African-American male students in the early grades, the academy shall illustrate, through a culturally responsive and strengths-based approach to instruction, what is lost when this demographic of students is prevented from



74 free participation in boyhood without the demands placed upon them
75 to attend to adult and peer interactions and attitudes.

76 (2) The academy established under subsection (1) of this
77 section shall be structured for one (1) semester of instruction
78 that is age and grade appropriate for students in kindergarten
79 through Grade 8. The lecture-based portions of instruction in the
80 academy must be conducted by culturally competent instructors with
81 adequate certification in cognitive and social-emotional
82 development and behaviors who are licensed by the State Department
83 of Education or who teach those subject areas at the collegiate
84 level.

85 (3) The African-American Male Success Academy must include,
86 but not be limited to, the following instructional components:

87 (a) An orientation, which the parents are encouraged to
88 attend;

89 (b) Classes in social studies that affirm the
90 experiences of adolescent African-American males, which
91 incorporate books, visuals and other materials that reflect the
92 richness of the histories, lives and points of view of
93 African-American men and their contributions to shaping social
94 change through their advocacy and personal sacrifices made for the
95 causes of social justice and equity;

96 (c) African-American literature and artistic
97 expression;



(d) Instructional interaction with authority figures in the home, school and community, including:

- (i) Caregivers;
- (ii) Educators;
- (iii) School administrators;
- (iv) Law enforcement officers; and
- (v) First responders;

(e) Presentations from community partners;

(f) Access to mental health professional for evaluations and assistance in response to traumatic events;

(g) Instruction that avoids the effects of unconscious biases by honoring and valuing the cultural and personal identities of all children;

(h) Strengths-based approaches to readiness for life, academic and career success; and

(i) For students in middle school grades, additional components shall consist of:

- (i) Facilitation of social interaction with peers and goal orientation to college completion;
- (ii) Positive youth development grounded in an ethic of care and love; and
- (iii) Create a pathway to college entrance through early exposure to academic and career options, faculty mentoring and integration into college life.



122 (4) Students participating in the academy must complete a
123 series of tasks designed to enhance their ability to overcome
124 traditional barriers to academic achievement, to develop racial
125 pride and self-awareness and develop scholar identity-view of self
126 as intellectual.

127 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
128 and after July 1, 2025.

