

By: Representative Roberson

To: Education

## HOUSE BILL NO. 1434

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE "AERONAUTICS, GEOSPATIAL, ENGINEERING,  
2 NURSING, AND TECHNICAL SKILLS (AGENTS) OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM ACT";  
3 TO ESTABLISH SPECIALIZED ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FOR HIGH SCHOOL  
4 STUDENTS IN GRADES 9-12 IN DISCIPLINES SUCH AS AERONAUTICS,  
5 GEOSPATIAL STUDIES, ENGINEERING, NURSING, AND TECHNICAL SKILLS; TO  
6 IMPROVE WORKFORCE READINESS AND POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES FOR  
7 LOW-INCOME STUDENTS NEAR THE AGENTS OF EXCELLENCE HOST  
8 INSTITUTIONS AT DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE  
9 UNIVERSITY AND ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY; TO DEFINE TERMINOLOGY; TO  
10 PROVIDE THAT THE PROGRAM SHALL BE JOINTLY ADMINISTERED BY THE  
11 STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE  
12 INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING; TO ESTABLISH THE AGENTS OF  
13 EXCELLENCE ADVISORY PANEL, WHICH SHALL PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS ON  
14 DESIGN, CURRICULUM AND FACILITIES OF HOST INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE  
15 PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM; TO PRESCRIBE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF  
16 HOST INSTITUTIONS; TO PROVIDE THAT ENROLLMENT SHALL BE PRIORITIZED  
17 TO LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN GRADES 9-12 ON A FIRST-COME,  
18 FIRST-SERVED BASIS; TO CAP THE ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS  
19 PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM AT 300 STUDENTS PER HOST INSTITUTION;  
20 TO PROVIDE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM CONTINGENT UPON  
21 FUNDING BEING APPROPRIATED FOR THAT REASON; TO PRESCRIBE THE  
22 MECHANISM BY WHICH HOST INSTITUTIONS SHALL BE PAID FOR  
23 PARTICIPATING STUDENTS; TO REQUIRE ANNUAL REPORTS ON ENROLLMENT,  
24 OUTCOMES AND FINANCES TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE  
25 CHAIRPERSON OF THE EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES  
26 COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE; TO REQUIRE COMPREHENSIVE  
27 EVALUATIONS OF THE PROGRAM EVERY FIVE YEARS TO ASSESS  
28 EFFECTIVENESS; TO REQUIRE PUBLIC MEETINGS TO BE HELD AT HOST  
29 INSTITUTIONS BEFORE PROGRAM ENROLLMENT TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON  
30 THE PROGRAM AND ADDRESSING QUESTIONS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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



32       **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known and cited as the  
33 "Aeronautics, Geospatial, Engineering, Nursing, and Technical  
34 Skills (AGENTS) of Excellence Program Act."

35       **SECTION 2.** The purpose of this act is to establish the  
36 AGENTS of Excellence Program to:

37               (a) Create specialized, regional academic programs for  
38 students in Grades 9-12, focused on high-demand disciplines,  
39 including:

40                       (i) Aeronautics;  
41                       (ii) Geospatial studies;  
42                       (iii) Engineering;  
43                       (iv) Nursing; and  
44                       (v) Technical skill, trades and workforce  
45 development through credentialing and certification.

46               (b) Improve workforce readiness and postsecondary  
47 educational outcomes for low-income students residing in service  
48 regions surrounding Delta State University, Mississippi Valley  
49 State University and Alcorn State University.

50               (c) Serve as on-campus schools modeled after the  
51 Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, established in  
52 Section 37-139-1, et seq., and the Mississippi School of the Arts  
53 established in Section 37-140-1, et seq., offering rigorous  
54 academics and career-oriented training.



(d) Enhance access to advanced education for underserved populations by providing residential boarding options, subject to funding.

**SECTION 3.** As used in this act, the following terms have the meaning herein ascribed, unless the context of use clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "Boards" means the State Board of Education and the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, vested with authority under Section 37-101-1 et seq.

(b) "Eligible students" means students:

(i) Enrolled in Grades 9-12.

(ii) Residing in designated regions surrounding Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University, or Alcorn State University; and

(iii) Classified as a low-income student based on gross median family income below the federal poverty threshold or other criteria determined by the program.

(c) "Host institution" means Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University or Alcorn State University.

(d) "Low-income student" means a student who has been identified by the State Department of Education, through inclusion in the identified student percentage, as having been approved for free meals based on documentation of:

(i) Receipt of benefits from the following federally funded programs:



1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
  2. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);
  3. Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR); or
  4. Medicaid, where applicable, as approved by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct matching with Medicaid data to identify children eligible for free meals;
- or

(ii) The inclusion of students who are identified as homeless children, migrant children, runaway children or Head Start children, who are approved for free school meals without application and not subject to verification, which includes foster children certified for free meals through means other than an application for free and reduced price school meals.

(d) "Program" means the Aeronautics, Geospatial, Engineering, Nursing, and Technical Skills (AGENTS) of Excellence Program established under this act.

**SECTION 4.** (1) (a) The Aeronautics, Geospatial, Engineering, Nursing, and Technical Skills (AGENTS) of Excellence Program shall be jointly governed and administered by the State Board of Education and the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, and shall oversee program implementation at



Delta State University and Mississippi Valley State University and  
Alcorn State University.

(b) The board shall promulgate rules and regulations  
necessary for the operation, funding and governance of the AGENTS  
of Excellence Program.

(2) (a) There is created a stakeholder's advisory panel,  
the members of which shall be appointed by the State  
Superintendent of Education and the Commissioner of Higher  
Education for the purpose of providing recommendations on program  
design, curriculum, facilities, and student services. Members of  
the advisory panel shall consist of:

(i) Three (3) licensed educators or administrators  
from eligible regions where the participating postsecondary  
educational institutions are located and from which eligible  
students residing therein shall be selected;

(ii) Three (3) superintendents of school districts  
within eligible regions where the participating postsecondary  
educational institutions are located and from which eligible  
students residing therein shall be selected;

(iii) Nine (9) parents or guardians of eligible  
students, three (3) of whom shall reside in each eligible region  
where a participating postsecondary educational institution is  
located and from which eligible students shall be selected; and



(iv) The Presidents of Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State University, or his or her designee.

(b) Appointments to the advisory panel shall be made within thirty (30) days of passage of this act. The advisory panel shall meet upon the call of the State Superintendent of Public Education and Commissioner of Higher Education and shall organize for business by selecting a chairman and vice chairman/secretary for keeping records of the panel. Members of the advisory panel shall receive no compensation but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses and mileage for attending meetings and necessary business of the panel, in the amount authorized for state employees under Section 25-3-41.

(3) The boards may utilize the staff of the State Department of Education, the IHL Board and other state agencies as may be required for the implementation of this act. The department may employ any personnel deemed necessary by the boards for assisting in the development and implementation of the plan relating to the implementation, operation and funding the program. The boards may also contract or enter into agreements with other agencies or private entities deemed necessary to carry out the duties and functions relating to the opening and operation of the school.

(4) To the extent possible, the boards shall enter into agreements with each host institution for the dual enrollment of eligible students attending the program. The boards may develop



and issue necessary regulations for the coordination of such courses for these students and the preparation and transfer of transcripts upon completion and graduation.

(3) Host institutions shall:

(a) Allocate space within existing facilities or construct appropriate facilities for classrooms, laboratories, and optional residential housing for students selected to participate in the AGENTS of Excellence Program; and

(b) Employ the requisite number of licensed teachers, administrators, staff and certified instructors with specific subject matter credentials in the content areas and subsidiary courses offered at each host institution to meet academic and operational requirements.

(4) Host institutions are encouraged to establish partnerships with local businesses, industries and educational organizations to provide mentorship, internships and career development opportunities for students to:

(a) Establish minimum standards governing annual increases in the academic performance indicators that are agreed upon with the board and each respective host institution;

(b) No later than thirty (30) days following the initial start of the school year, conduct ongoing assessments of student performance enrolled in the program, including an initial baseline assessment of knowledge and skills in each grade level and academic content area in which instruction is provided;



177                   (c) Establish data-driven instructional programs;  
178                   (d) Provide curriculum that is aligned with state  
179 academic standards for college and career readiness;  
180                   (e) Develop appropriate educational goals for each  
181 student and offer differentiated instruction to meet the needs of  
182 all students;  
183                   (f) Provide academic support and interventions,  
184 including tutoring and other appropriate educational assistance,  
185 that are targeted for students who perform below proficiency  
186 standards on an academic performance indicator;  
187                   (g) Provide for a minimum of instructional hours as  
188 applicable, which may include any of the following:  
189                       (i) An extended school day;  
190                       (ii) An extended school year;  
191                       (iii) A minimum of four (4) weeks of summer  
192 school; and  
193                       (iv) Saturday instructional classes;  
194                   (h) Provide programs to improve professional  
195 development programs for administrators, teachers and support  
196 professionals that focus on communication centered upon students'  
197 academic and career goals;  
198                   (i) Formulate and implement programs designed to  
199 improve the learning environment and school culture, which shall  
200 include measures to ensure the safety of students and staff, and  
201 may include the following:





- (i) Positive behavioral supports;
- (ii) Professional development; and
- (iii) Coordination with community partners.

**SECTION 5.**

(1) Enrollment in the Aeronautics, Geospatial, Engineering, Nursing, and Technical Skills (AGENTS) of Excellence Program shall be open on a first-come, first-served basis to students in Grades 9-12 residing in the service regions surrounding Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State University. Priority shall be given to low-income students attending schools or enrolled in school districts with low academic performance as determined by Section 37-17-6.

(2) The program shall offer a rigorous academic curriculum aligned with Mississippi's College and Career Readiness Standards, and specialized focus areas which, at a minimum, shall include:

- (a) Aeronautics and aviation technology;
- (b) Geospatial technologies and geographic information systems (GIS);
- (c) Engineering and robotics;
- (d) Nursing and allied healthcare pathways;
- (e) Skilled trades, including welding, coding, auto-mechanics, HVAC and advanced manufacturing; and
- (f) Dual enrollment opportunities with host institutions shall be provided in accordance with Section 37-15-38.



(3) Additionally, the program shall ensure that tutoring, counseling, and career mentorship shall be available to all students.

(4) A residential option shall be offered to students accepted into the program and residing more than thirty (30) miles from the main campus of the host institution of enrollment, contingent upon funding. Provided that funding is made available to facilitate a residential boarding component of the program, such facilities shall include dormitories, dining services and staff supervision, adhering to safety standards prescribed under Section 45-11-101.

**SECTION 6.** (1) Implementation and operation of the AGENTS of Excellence Program are contingent upon appropriations by the Legislature. Joint annual budget estimates shall be prepared by the State Board of Education, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, and submitted to the Legislature. For the operation and support of the program, the boards or host institutions may receive contributions, donations, gifts, bequests of money, other forms of financial assistance and property, equipment, materials or manpower from persons, foundations, trust funds, corporations, organizations and other sources, public or private, to be expended and utilized by the boards in carrying out this act.

(2) (a) The State Department of Education shall make payments to the host institutions for each student enrolled in the



AGENTS of Excellence Program equal to the state share of the Mississippi Student Funding Formula payments for each student in net membership at the school district or residence. In calculating the local contribution for purposes of determining the state share of the total funding formula payments, the department shall deduct the pro rata local contribution of the school district in which the student resides, to be determined as provided in Section 37-151-211(2)(b).

(b) Payments made pursuant to this subsection by the department must be made at the same time and in the same manner as total funding formula payments are made to school districts under Sections 37-151-101 and 37-151-103. Amounts payable to each host institution must be determined by the department based on the actual annual enrollment of eligible students over the duration of the program, which shall not exceed three hundred (300) students per institution. Such payments must be reconciled with the net enrollment using months two (2) and three (3) of the preceding school year preceding the year that funds are being appropriated and any necessary adjustments must be made to payments during the program's following year of operation.

(3) For students attending the AGENTS of Excellence Program located in the school district in which the student resides, the school district in which the host institution is located shall pay directly to the institution an amount for each student enrolled in the program equal to the ad valorem tax receipts and in-lieu



277 payments received per pupil for the support of the local school  
278 district in which the student resides. The pro rata ad valorem  
279 receipts and in-lieu receipts to be transferred to the host  
280 institution shall include all levies for the support of the local  
281 school district under Sections 37-57-1 (local contribution to the  
282 adequate education program) and 37-57-105 (school district  
283 operational levy) and may not include any taxes levied for the  
284 retirement of the local school district's bonded indebtedness or  
285 short-term notes or any taxes levied for the support of  
286 vocational-technical education programs. The amount of funds  
287 payable to the host institution by the school district must be  
288 based on the previous year's enrollment data and ad valorem  
289 receipts and in-lieu receipts of the local school district in  
290 which the student resides. The pro rata amount must be calculated  
291 by dividing the local school district's months one (1) through  
292 nine (9) average daily membership into the total amount of ad  
293 valorem receipts and in-lieu receipts, as reported to the State  
294 Department of Education by the local school district. The local  
295 school district shall pay an amount equal to this pro rata amount  
296 multiplied by the number of students enrolled in the program,  
297 based on the program's end of first month enrollment for the  
298 current school year. The amount must be paid by the school  
299 district to the host institution before January 16 of the current  
300 fiscal year. If the local school district does not pay the  
301 required amount to the host institution before January 16, the



State Department of Education shall reduce the local school district's January transfer of Mississippi Student Funding Formula funds by the amount owed to the host institution and shall redirect that amount to the institution. Any such payments made under this subsection (3) by the State Department of Education to the host institution must be made at the same time and in the same manner as total funding formula payments are made to school districts under Sections 37-151-101 and 37-151-103.

(4) For students attending the AGENTS of Excellence Program who do not reside in the district where the university is located, the State Department of Education shall pay to the host institution an amount as follows: the pro rata ad valorem receipts and in-lieu payments per pupil for the support of the local school district in which the student resides under Sections 37-57-1 (local contribution to the adequate education program) and 37-57-105 (school district operational levy), however, not including any taxes levied for the retirement of the local school district's bonded indebtedness or short-term notes or any taxes levied for the support of vocational-technical education programs. The amount of funds payable to the host institution by the school district must be based on the previous year's enrollment data and ad valorem receipts and in-lieu receipts of the local school district in which the student resides. The pro rata amount must be calculated by dividing the local school district's months one (1) through nine (9) average daily membership into the total



amount of ad valorem receipts and in-lieu receipts, as reported to the State Department of Education by the transferor local school district. The payable amount shall be equal to this pro rata amount multiplied by the number of students enrolled in the pilot program, based on the program's end of first month enrollment for the current school year. The State Department of Education shall reduce the school district's January transfer of Mississippi Student Funding Formula funds by the amount owed to the host institution and shall redirect that amount to the institution. Any such payments made under this subsection (4) by the State Department of Education to the host institution must be made at the same time and in the same manner as total funding formula payments are made to school districts under Sections 37-151-101 and 37-151-103.

(5) The State Department of Education shall disburse state transportation funding to the university on the same basis and in the same manner as it is paid to school districts under the adequate education program, for those students deemed eligible for transportation services.

**SECTION 7.** (1) The boards shall conduct a study and prepare an annual written report on the effectiveness of the program and shall submit the same to the Governor, the chairpersons of the Education Committees of the House and Senate and the chairpersons of the Universities and Colleges Committees of the House and Senate. The report shall include:



352 (a) Enrollment and demographic data;  
353 (b) Academic and workforce outcomes; and  
354 (c) Financial summaries and funding needs.

355 (2) A comprehensive program evaluation shall be conducted  
356 every five (5) years to assess effectiveness in improving academic  
357 performance and workforce readiness.

358 **SECTION 8.** Prior to the enrollment of students into the  
359 AGENTS of Excellence Program, the State Board of Education and the  
360 Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning shall  
361 conduct a public meeting at each host institution which shall  
362 include a presentation on the AGENTS of Excellence Program,  
363 distribution of information materials on the program's purpose,  
364 application process and benefits, and a question and answer  
365 session with parents and community members to address the  
366 implementation of the program. Upon being notified by the State  
367 Department of Education of a proposed meeting date, each school  
368 district within the affected counties of region of impact shall  
369 provide public notice for each community meeting.

370 **SECTION 9.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
371 and after July 1, 2025.

