

Leaps and Bounds: How Early Learning Supports the "Mississippi Miracle"  
A GLR Learning Tuesdays Webinar  
November 14, 2023 | 3:00-4:30pm ET

**Moderator:**



**Micayla Tatum**  
**Director of Early Childhood Policy**  
**Mississippi First**

Micayla Tatum is the Director of Early Childhood Policy at Mississippi First. During her time with Mississippi First, Micayla has led the expansion of the organization's early education issue area to focus more widely on the 0-5 space. Micayla is a passionate advocate for public education and believes that all children, regardless of where they are born, should have access to a high-quality education that prepares them to engage with their community and the world. Micayla left the classroom in her sixth year of teaching. She is a 2016 Teach for America alumna and co-founder of the Bettye Smith Brown Memorial Scholarship. Micayla was also a Teach Plus Mississippi Senior Policy Fellow and a recipient of Amherst College's Class of '54 Commitment to Teaching Fellowship Award (2021). She earned two bachelor's degrees (cum laude) in American Studies and Anthropology, as well as a certificate in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Amherst College and a master's degree in Education Policy and Leadership at American University.

**Panelists:**



**Jill Dent, Ph.D.**  
**Director, Office of Early Childhood**  
**Mississippi Department of Education**

Dr. Jill Dent is the Director of the Office of Early Childhood for the Mississippi Department of Education. She manages the pre-k and kindergarten initiatives for MDE. She has led implementation of a quality initiative for pre-k, and the implementation of the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013 in the state. She has implemented a quality pre-k initiative to include early childhood coaches, family engagement activities, and professional development activities with a Kellogg Foundation grant. Dr. Dent has worked in the early childhood field for over 30 years. As the previous Director of the Office of Early Childhood Care and Development with the MS Department of Human Services (MDHS), she managed the Child Care Development Funds and the Healthy Homes MS home visiting program. Prior to this position, she managed the child welfare data system at MDHS, managed state and federal grants at various non-profits, and managed and taught in early learning classrooms for many years.

Dr. Dent earned a PhD. in Educational Leadership and Administration from Jackson State University, a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Administration from William Carey University, and a B.S. in Child and Family Studies from the University of Southern Mississippi.



**Ruth W. Patterson, M.D. FAAP**  
**Associate Professor of Pediatrics**  
**University of Mississippi Medical Center**  
**Diplomate of American Board of Pediatrics**

Ruth Patterson, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and board-certified pediatrician, completed medical school training at Howard University College of Medicine, Washington D.C. in 1982 and completed residency training in pediatrics at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in 1985. Dr. Patterson returned to UMMC in 1991 to serve as medical director of the Newborn Nursery and supervising faculty of residents and students for pediatric inpatients admitted to Batson Children’s Hospital. In 1998 Dr. Patterson transferred within UMMC to ambulatory services as a primary care pediatrician. After a brief retirement in 2018, she returned to UMMC in 2019 to work as part of the MS Thrive Child Health and Development Project supported by a HRSA grant. Dr. Patterson has been active with the American Academy of Pediatrics and member of the division of developmental pediatrics. Dr. Patterson has been involved in Foreign Mission medical work both in Honduras, Central America and in Lesotho, South Africa.



**Tenette Smith, Ed.D.**  
**Executive Director, Elementary Education and Reading**  
**Mississippi Department of Education**

Dr. Tenette Smith currently serves as the Executive Director of the Office of Elementary Education and Reading with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). With over 30 years in education, her experience she has served as the Assistant State K-3 Literacy Director (MDE), an elementary school administrator, curriculum specialist, kindergarten teacher, first grade teacher and a field coordinator for an NSF funded Delta Rural Systemic Initiative (Math and Science). Dr. Smith began her professional career as the Director of the Lottie B. Thornton Early Childhood Center at Jackson State University. She received a Doctor of Early Childhood Education, Master of Science in Educational Leadership and Bachelor of Science in Education from Jackson State University.

Dr. Smith has presented research and conducted professional development on local, state, and the national level including the NCTM National Conference and the Urban Education National Conference. She has received professional training via the Council for Chief School Officers (CCSSO), Consortium on Reading Excellence (C.O.R.E.), the Zaentz Professional Learning

Academy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the Language Essential for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and the Systemic Change Leadership (EDC).