Appointed Versus Elected Superintendents

There are about 60 school districts in Mississippi in which superintendents are elected. Throughout the US, with over 14,500 school districts, only about 140 districts elect their superintendents (1%). Mississippi elects the most.

Election of superintendents narrows significantly the pool of candidates. Candidates for elected superintendent positions must live within the school district at the time of the election.

Many small rural districts have difficulty finding highly qualified candidates who are willing to run for the office of superintendent.

In the 2011 election, 13 school districts had uncontested races for superintendent – the community had no choice, it just got the one person who lived within the district & was willing to wage a campaign

Four of the 13 uncontested superintendent races in 2011 were in school districts that were rated below Successful that year according to Mississippi’s Accountability Rating System

10 of the 13 uncontested superintendent races in 2011 were in districts with underperforming schools (below Successful), and three had at least one Failing school

In 2007, 20 school districts had uncontested races for superintendent

In 2007, one school district had NO ONE run for superintendent – the school board appointed the retiring superintendent until a special election could be held

Many of the districts with uncontested races in 2007 had low-performing schools, two with uncontested races in 2007 had Level 1 (failing) schools

One district with a Level 1 school had uncontested superintendent races in 2003 and 2007

When a superintendent is elected, he or she is not accountable to the school board because the board cannot fire him/her. Therefore, there is no direct accountability when schools fail. The school board blames the superintendent, the superintendent blames the school board and the citizens are confused – they don’t know who is at fault.

When an elected superintendent proves ineffective, students lose 4 years of quality education (until the next election). Children do not recover from 4 years of poor education. When an ineffective superintendent is appointed, the board can act much more quickly to replace him or her.

Elected superintendents often avoid advancing issues that would improve education in their districts out of fear that they will be defeated.
In a 2007 superintendent’s race, the incumbent threatened the district employees – including teachers – that he would fire them if they didn’t support him.