

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

## UMMC STUDENT ENRICHMENT PROGRAM PARTNERS WITH CITY OF JACKSON

Media contact: Matt Westerfield at (601) 984-1104 or mwesterfield@umc.edu.

JACKSON, Miss. – The university of Mississippi Medical Center's enrichment program for middle school students, offered through the Division of Multicultural Affairs, is partnering with the City of Jackson this academic school year to promote the importance of eating healthy in the face of a growing obesity epidemic.

Mayor Harvey Johnson, Jackson Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Cedrick Gray, and other community figures will be on hand for orientation day of this school year's Science Training and Enrichment Program (STEP) on Saturday morning, Sept. 22 at UMMC.

Under the guidance of Dr. Gaarmel Funches, Director of Community Education and Outreach in Multicultural Affairs, this year's STEP program includes about 60 students from JPS, Choctaw Tribal Schools and Humphries County School District in the Mississippi Delta from grades six through eight. The Saturday institute, which meets once a month throughout most of the school year, is designed to provide academic enrichment in the areas of math and science in the form of hands-on interactive activities to develop critical thinking skills and reading comprehension for disadvantaged, underserved students and also to increase their awareness in health careers.

"We focus on different organ systems every year," said Dr. Jasmine Taylor, Associate Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs. "This year we're going to learn about the GI system, and we chose that because of the obesity epidemic we are fighting in this state. We know from the statistics how obesity is impacting our children and felt we needed to do something about that. Focusing on the gastrointestinal system will allow us to talk about nutrition and other obesity-related concerns."

Taylor said the focus complimented the mayor's youth initiative on childhood obesity, making the partnership a natural fit. For that reason, this year's STEP program is being sponsored in part by the Mayor's office.

STEP is one of many enrichment programs offered by Multicultural Affairs. Other initiatives provide outreach to elementary school students, high school, undergraduate and graduate students.

"We're trying to focus on those areas we feel students in Mississippi have trouble with. We're still below the national average on math and science. STEP focuses on taking talented students in the 6-8<sup>th</sup> grades and making sure that they can connect the dots as to why it's important to study math and science. They get a chance to meet real life people who use those skills day to day in their careers."

Mayor Johnson will formally kick off the 2012-13 school year at 9:00 a.m., Saturday morning in the Classroom Wing on the UMMC campus.

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Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: [LAGriffin@umc.edu](mailto:LAGriffin@umc.edu).

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals in the University Hospitals and Health System, and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at [umc.edu/publicaffairs](http://umc.edu/publicaffairs)