

BILOXI SCHOOLS

2000-2001

The Biloxi Schools in 2000 - 2001

Biloxi – Population, 2000 Census – 50,644

Mayor, 2000 – A.J. Holloway

City Council – Bill Fluty, Tom Wall, Mike Fitzpatrick, Jim Compton, Eric Dickey,
Tom Ferrill, Charles T. Harrison

Superintendent, Biloxi Public Schools – Larry Drawdy – 1994 - Present

Biloxi School Board –

2000 – Madelon Gruich, Jaye Brice, Jimmie Roy, Rick Stewart, David Blaine

2001 - Madelon Gruich, Rick Stewart, David Blaine, Mildred Roy, Glendon Johnson

Student Enrollment in 2000 – 5,791

Total Budget, Biloxi Public Schools, for 2000 – 2001 - \$47,726,000
(includes \$5-million building program)

X. THE BILOXI SCHOOLS – 2000 – 2001 – AND BEYOND

As people celebrated the end of the 1990s, the Biloxi Public School District was well positioned to meet the challenges and the hopes of a new century. With the passage of the bond issue in 1999, school construction either underway or planned occupied a great deal of the time and effort of the administrative staff during 2000 and 2001.

Superintendent Dr. Larry Drawdy in 2001 is in his seventh year as head of the Biloxi schools. The central office staff includes Dr. Robert Bowles, deputy superintendent; Dr. Paul Tisdale, director of administrative services; Mr. Jude McDonnell, director of business management; Mr. Nolan Broussard, supervisor of support services; Mrs. Susan Patterson, coordinator of federal programs and curriculum/instruction; and Mrs. Beryl Dupont, coordinator of school information/community outreach. Mrs. Diane Miller is nursing supervisor for the schools.

Principals in the Biloxi schools in 2001 are Joe Allen, Center for New Opportunities; Charles Benton, Fernwood; Susan Brand, Beauvoir; Glenn Dedeaux, Nichols; Bernell Kelly, Jeff Davis; Murray Killebrew, Lopez; Pam Manners, Michel; Melissa Nance, DuKate; Susan Patterson, Gorenflo; Andrea Petro, Pop's Ferry; Laurie Pitre, North Bay; Cecil Powell, Biloxi High; and Ken Hall, Director of the R.D. Brown Vocational Center.

Looking back to the time he accepted the position as superintendent of the Biloxi schools, Dr. Drawdy discussed his philosophy of education and the principles governing his work: "I am committed to working toward school programs that provide high level academic and career/technology opportunities; built on an awareness of the importance of parental involvement and support and the development of a partnership between community businesses and organizations and the school system; and directed by competent, qualified, caring staff members who are consistent and fair in their dealings with students, parents, teachers, and other district personnel, and the community and who recognize that they are accountable to the people they serve."

The superintendent underscores his belief that schools must always be places "where learning takes place in a well-disciplined atmosphere, with parent involvement and assistance as appropriate, and with students held accountable for their actions."

Recent salary increases for school employees have placed the district at the top of the teacher pay scale in the state. In addition, teachers and administrators have benefits that could hardly have been dreamed of only twenty years ago, including paid health and medical insurance and retirement benefits that have proved substantial and fully protected by a highly capable governing body.

Putting into effect the capital improvements proposals funded under the bond issue passed by Biloxi voters on September 28, 1999, the district employed Guild Hardy Associates Architects PA,

and the firm of Yates and Sons for construction management of the entire capital improvements and bond issue projects. By the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, additions and renovations at Beauvoir, Jeff Davis, Lopez, and Popp's Ferry schools were completed.

The administration and the Board had, in effect, promised the public that all schools in the district would be upgraded to a level of quality comparable to the best schools in the region. Learning center additions in these schools were added to provide hands-on activities. Power upgrades and expansion of electrical service at the older elementary schools to accommodate computers and printers in each classroom were completed at the existing Biloxi High School, Michel Junior High, Lopez, Beauvoir, Jeff Davis, Popp's Ferry, and Howard II. Renovations and additions to administrative areas included additional offices, clinic space, and new finishes, with designs particular to Lopez, Beauvoir, Jeff Davis, and Popp's Ferry. Enclosed corridors to permit students to move from building to building without going outside were constructed at Biloxi High, Michel, Lopez, Beauvoir, Popp's Ferry, and Jeff Davis, together with replacing doors and hardware at these schools, upgrading and expansion of outdated intercom systems to comply with district-wide intercom system standards, and bus drop-off canopies at the elementary schools and other improvements. State-of-the-art classrooms, including necessary restroom facilities, mechanical systems and utilities were constructed at Lopez and Popp's Ferry; and existing spaces at Biloxi High and Michel were converted to state-of-the-art discovery and language laboratories.

With an enrollment of approximately 6,000 students, the Biloxi Public Schools system includes twelve modern and well-equipped school plants. Since 1998 the district has held the highest level of accreditation by state and regional commissions. The student body and the faculty continue to be among the most highly diverse in the state.

The Biloxi faculty includes 475 licensed, qualified personnel. In addition to the licensed/certified staff, the district also employs about 300 non-licensed support personnel. An exceptionally high percent of the faculty hold advanced degrees. One might conclude with some degree of certainty that no other school system in the state employs a staff whose personal lives and academic backgrounds have taken them into more different states and countries and universities (Skelton and Hunt 8).

Biloxi students today attend seven elementary schools, grades K-6—Beauvoir, DuKate, Gorenflo, Jeff Davis, Lopez, North Bay, and Popp's Ferry; an alternative school, the Center for New Opportunities, housed in the Howard II building; three junior high schools, grades 7-9; Biloxi Senior High School, grades 10-12; and the vocational-technical complex on the high school campus.

The new North Bay Elementary School, opened in 2000, stands as a harbinger of things to come, as two other new elementary schools are in the first phases of construction, on the Gorenflo and Nichols grounds; all other elementary schools have undergone extensive and significant renovation and additions; the three junior high schools will soon be combined in a single location, occupying

the present Biloxi High School building, which will house grades 8 and 9, and the present Michel building, which will house grade 7. The new \$32-million high school in the North Bay area is expected to open in August 2002, together with a \$3-million career/technology center, followed by the two new elementary schools in 2003. The new schools will provide the latest technology for staff and students. The high school will include related recreational and athletic facilities and career/technology programs of the highest quality.

In 2002 it is expected that the United States District Court of the Southern District of Mississippi will consider a motion filed by the Biloxi Public School District for declaration of unitary status.

Almost nothing so clearly defines a community as the quality of its schools. Statistics related to the Biloxi schools show that the teacher/student ratio is 1:15. Average teacher salary is \$38,708. Expenditure per student is more than \$6,000 annually. Sixty-five percent of the high school graduates attend colleges or universities (*Images of Biloxi Bay* 35).

Reviewing the earliest years of the Biloxi schools, one is appalled by the low salary scale for teachers when they were forced to plead for "a living wage." And it strikes a very pleasant note to realize that today's teachers receive salaries and benefits reasonably attractive when compared with those of employees in other career fields. Although state educators continue to feel underpaid and continue to push for salaries that would equal the Southeast average, the gap has been substantially narrowed. Biloxi ranks at the top among the state's school 153 school districts in pay for teachers. In addition, the state provides excellent health benefits and a pension plan that has proved stable and soundly managed, with a unique incremental feature that teachers may choose, called "the thirteenth check" and payable in December each year, increasing with every year of retirement.

The Biloxi schools continue to make efforts throughout the school year to build upon community interest and involvement and to increase direct communication with parents and guardians. Parent-teacher conferences, scheduled on a regular basis, are an important facet of the schools' attempts to weld a partnership between parent and school that will produce lasting and worthwhile results.

Extraordinary curricular opportunities are provided for Biloxi students. High school students may enroll in traditional college preparatory or advanced placement courses. The school offers state-of-the-art technology programs, as well as career/technology and business courses, fine arts and language classes (including choral and stringed instrumental music and band, advanced art classes, speech and drama, French, Spanish, and Latin), and a wide range of other curricular choices. Interscholastic sports and Air Force Junior ROTC programs offer students many opportunities for physical activities as well as competitions. The Olympic-sized swimming pool in the natatorium adjacent to the school is used by elementary students for beginning swimming and lifesaving classes and for secondary individual and team competitions. Of particular note are the Latin courses not often found in today's schools. Advanced placement and other accelerated classes are among the more than 140 courses BHS students may choose. Marine and aquatic science, astronomy, probability and statistics, psychology, entrepreneurship, a much praised and highly honored Air

Force Junior ROTC program, and an art curriculum which includes graphics, painting, and sculpture are among the curricular opportunities available to Biloxi students.

Special programs include Project Read, HOSTS, Accelerated Reader, K-9, with a Reading Renaissance component in computer-assisted instruction, Elementary Peer Counselors, Language!, a large number of special education programs for children with disabilities, homebound instruction, extended year program, GED testing, guidance services, and other special services for Biloxi students.

Dr. Larry Drawdy has summed up the community's hopes for its children's future: "One of our most important needs is that we continue to have the support of people who are committed to excellence, dedicated to providing the best educational environments for our children, concerned about making the future a better place for them and for us. We believe that we have made the plans and charted the course and provided the means to make a successful transition from where we are to where we hope to be. We look back at what the Biloxi schools have accomplished. We know our history—and our knowledge of our past informs us and gives us guidance for the future, strengthening the qualities of self-reliance and optimism that Biloxians have always possessed. As our new schools are being built and other buildings have undergone extensive renovation and improvements, we have dedicated the buildings to all Biloxians who have shown unwavering support for the Biloxi schools."

Asked to write about the Biloxi schools for a time capsule to be placed at one of the schools, Dr. Drawdy wrote:

This message is directed to Biloxians living in the future who will one day open this time capsule and have a brief glance backward into the history of Biloxi and the Biloxi Public Schools of 2001.

It is impossible to predict with certainty what that future will be like. I think I can foresee with reasonable accuracy that the world will be much different from the world we know in 2001. There will surely be advances in medicine and industry and technology similar in impact to those advances we have seen in the past century. I suspect that there will also be many changes in the way people live, the foods they produce, the ways they travel, the methods of protecting and safeguarding the environment, the laws that govern their lives as they seek to meet the needs of an ever-growing economy and population.

It is my hope, however, that the world will have retained the many wonderful and beautiful things that the people of Biloxi and the students and staff of the Biloxi schools experience every day. We live in a place where Nature provides one of the most beautiful settings for the lives of all Biloxians. We live in a nation founded on principles that have endured and will endure, we hope, forever. We are rich in the diversity and interests and talents of our citizens. We enjoy and appreciate the freedoms that generations before us sacrificed to preserve—in our freedom to worship as we wish, to express our ideas, to move without restrictions. to shape the governing entities under which we live.

We have been blessed with the good fortune of living in a community whose citizens wholeheartedly support our schools, drawing on the long and rich heritage of Biloxi's commitment to making our schools as good as they can be. Today we are writing one of the most productive and exciting chapters in the history of the Biloxi schools. We are undergoing the largest renovation and construction program in the history of Biloxi, with work now in progress in the building of two new elementary schools, renovation of all the other elementary and junior high schools, and construction of a new Biloxi High School. It is a matter of great pride to all of us that our schools presently enjoy the distinction of having been accredited at the highest level of accreditation our state can offer.

I know that I speak for the staff of the Biloxi schools, and indeed, for the entire community, when I express the hope that those who are present for the opening of the time capsule will be able to feel the love of their fellow Biloxians reaching to them across the years; to know that we wish them well with all our hearts; to accept our charge to them to make education for Biloxi's children the highest priority for this community; and to share the pride we feel in our schools and our entire school community. May that day be one in which you find a time capsule and look not only into the history of Biloxi and the Biloxi schools but also into our hearts.

Obviously the history of the Biloxi Public Schools has been uneven; it has also been both exciting and rewarding. If one were to choose three words to sum up the history of the Biloxi schools, *effort* and *achievement* and *vision* might be the best choices. The words suggest both the beginning and the end of education—the unyielding determination of Biloxians to provide the best schools possible for their children and the expectation that students would take advantage of the opportunities they had been given.

For the young people of Biloxi, as for American students everywhere, school has been variously described as a journey, an adventure, the opening of doors into new worlds, preparation for a future one can only imagine. It is all these things and much more. For young Biloxians it is the sum of all the experiences and training of a staff as diverse as the students themselves—of a community as rich in promise and tradition as any other in the nation. It is not merely preparation for life—but life itself, one experience leading inexorably to another, each succeeding day changed by the day before.

Looking back at the long and honorable record of the Biloxi Public Schools is not simply a journey into the past. It also provides a glimpse into the future. The picture of the Biloxi Public Schools today may be viewed against an extraordinary history of achievement, extending from the 1860s, when Biloxians first set up a tax designed to support public schools, into 2002, as Biloxi looks into a new century. For almost 140 years the deep community support of its public schools has endured

And having long ago committed themselves to the timeless values of education, Biloxians today are still building, hoping to create for their children a safe haven, where every day brings the joy of learning. There is every reason to believe that the next volumes in this history will be equally rich in commitment and vision and the realization of promise.



*The Class of 2001 – Officers – John Sullivan, Amber Elmore,
Lyndsey Lamas, president, Tyeisha Scott*



The Class of 2001 Celebrates



Biloxi School Board - 1999

Mildred Roy, assistant secretary, Madelon Gruich, president, Patti Golden, Board Attorney, Rick Stewart, vice president, Glendon Johnson, Board member, Major John Tenaglia, KAFB Liaison, and Superintendent Dr. Larry Drawdy

(Pictured at right, David Blaine, Board secretary)





Dr. Paul Tisdale, Director of Administrative Services; Mr. Jude McDonnell, Director of Business Management; Dr. Larry Drawdy, Superintendent; Dr. Robert Bowles, Deputy Superintendent; Mr. John Hall, Technology Coordinator; Mrs. Susan Patterson, Principal, Gorenflo, and Coordinator, of Federal Programs/Curriculum Instructions; Mrs. Sarah Landry, Director of Exceptional Education; Mrs. Beryl Dupont, Coordinator of School Information/ Community Outreach; Mr. Nolan Broussard, Supervisor of Support Services



*Drawing of the new Biloxi High School
North of Biloxi Bay – Opening in 2002*