

BILOXI SCHOOLS

1960-1969

The Biloxi Schools In The 1960s

Biloxi – Population, 1960 Census - 44,053

Mayor, 1960 – Laz Quave

City Council, 1960 – J.A. "Tony" Creel, W.K. Dukate

Superintendent, Biloxi Public Schools – R.D. Brown, 1960-1975

Biloxi School Board –

1960 – Dr. J.A. Graves, C.T. Switzer, Glenn Swetman, Beverly Briscoe, Peter Kuljis

1961 – Dr. J.A. Graves, C.T. Switzer, Glenn Swetman, Beverly Briscoe, Peter Kuljis

1962 – Dr. J.A. Graves, C.T. Switzer, Richard Creel, Beverly Briscoe, Peter Kuljis

1963 – Dr. J.A. Graves, C.T. Switzer, , Peter Kuljis, Mrs. Dudley Andrews,
Richard Creel

1964 – Dr. J.A. Graves, C.T. Switzer, , Peter Kuljis, Mrs. Dudley Andrews,
Richard Creel

1965 – C.T. Switzer, Richard Creel, Mrs. Dudley Andrews, Dr. Peter Pavlov,
Mrs. Earl B. Friedman

1966 – C. T. Switzer, Mrs. Dudley Andrews, Dr. Peter Pavlov,
Mrs. Earl B. Friedman, Charles D. Hollis

1967 – C.T. Switzer, Mrs. Dudley Andrews, Dr. Peter Pavlov,
Mrs. Earl B. Friedman, Charles D. Hollis

1968 – Fred Carron, Charles D. Hollis, Mrs. Earl B. Friedman, C.T. Switzer,
Irvin Fink

1969 – Fred Carron, C.T. Switzer, Charles D. Hollis, Irvin Fink,
Mrs. Earl B. Friedman

Student Enrollment in 1960-1961, reported in first week –5,598

Total Budget, Biloxi Public Schools, for 1960-1961 – \$1,819,599.00

VI. THE BILOXI SCHOOLS – 1960 - 1969

In the Biloxi Public Schools, as in the world outside the school community, the decade of the 1960s would be one of the most demanding and at the same time the most satisfying in the school system's long and distinguished history. It was a time of searching for excellence in instruction and academic achievement, for ways to implement the national mandate given to public schools with increasing federal aid to education, and for the will and purpose and strength to overcome problems rooted in the history of the nation itself.

The history of the Biloxi Public Schools clearly shows that the development of the city's school system has not proceeded at an even pace. There were periods of rapid expansion and change; there were also periods of simply standing in place. It is likely that no other period produced such remarkable and far-reaching changes over a long period of time as was true of the 1960s. In a peculiarly significant way, it seemed appropriate that the public schools of Biloxi should mark their hundredth birthday in a decade that drew on the best inner resources of Biloxians.



The 1960s extended the building programs that had highlighted the Biloxi Public Schools history in the late 1950s, with Dr. Graves as president of the Board and members C.T. Switzer, Glenn Swetman, Beverly Briscoe, and Peter Kuljis. *(Pictured at right – Beauvoir Elementary School)*



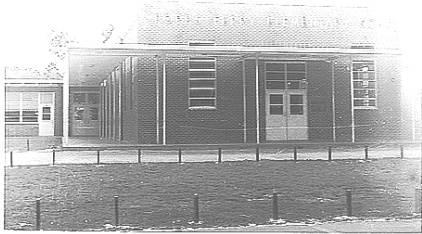
At the beginning of the year in 1960, Mr. Tynes made a report to the Board on the status of the building program:

1. Perkins Addition – completed and occupied; final payments received; final audit made.
2. Beauvoir Elementary – completed and occupied; final federal audit made; final payments received.
3. Fernwood Junior High School – completed and occupied; final SEFC payment received.
4. Dukate Addition – completed and occupied; final SEFC payment received.
5. Gorenflo Addition – completed and occupied; final SEFC payment received.
6. West End Addition – work resumed 1/7/60 after 45 days delay; exterior door bucks installed; masonry work underway.

7. Nichols High School – work ahead of schedule; proceeding at very satisfactory pace; all roofs virtually completed; masonry finished in shop area, 75% in classroom wing; gym floor being poured this week; partition walls begun on second floor of classroom wing.
8. Biloxi Senior H.S. – grading and excavation in advanced stage; pouring of foundations underway; progress satisfactory; "little red house" superstructure removed; G.E. Bass has architects' approval to use the floor slab for storage and rest room area.
9. Michel Addition – federal 10% of funds received; architects busy on working drawings.
10. St. Mary Elementary – federal 10% of funds received; architects busy on working drawings; site needs clearing of trees and stumps.
11. Biloxi Sr. H.S. Shop Annex – funds shifted to Popp's Ferry Elem. Project upon request and recommendation of U.S. Office of Education; Annex to be reactivated in June.
12. Popp's Ferry Elementary School – district qualified for "only" \$111,531.00 federal entitlement in the November 15 cutoff application; upon advice of Dr. Staehle in U.S. Office of Education the \$223,534.00 applied for in Vocational Shop Annex project was transferred to Popp's Ferry project; federal notice received that \$334,065.00 (sum of two amounts above listed) has been reserved for Popp's Ferry project; request made to SEFC for \$64,085.00 to complete the \$399,150.00 originally budgeted for Popp's Ferry project; negotiations underway for site.
13. Central Jr. H.S. (Renovation of old B.H.S. – inspection by architects and engineers during holidays; complete report expected from Mr. Fountain at January 18 Board meeting.
14. Administration Building – proposed in long-range plan; revision on Board agenda.

Completed construction projects during this period later included building Jefferson Davis Elementary School in 1960-1961, with additions completed in 1965 and 1968; an addition to Michel Junior High School in 1961; two additions to Gorenflo Elementary School in 1960 and 1968; completion of Popp's Ferry Elementary School in 1960-1961; additions costing \$139,496 to Nichols-Perkins Attendance Center in 1966; and the new Central Junior High School in 1962, at a cost of \$213,060, which included a building centered around the old Biloxi High School auditorium (later it would be Dukate Elementary School). In 1964 a \$182,781 addition was built for Biloxi High School. *(Pictured at right – Jefferson Davis Elementary School)*





The growth of the Biloxi school system during the decade is reflected in the increase of its budget from \$1,819,559.00 in 1960-1961 to \$4,135,341 in 1968-1969. In the same period, teachers' salaries rose from an average of \$5,035 to an average of \$7,060 for an AA certificate.



On September 1, 1960, 5,598 students enrolled in the Biloxi schools: Biloxi High School, 938; Central Junior High, 501; Mary Michel Junior High, 539; Beauvoir, 686; Dukate, 375; Gorenflo, 564; Howard II, 447; Lopez, 513; West End, 470; and Fernwood Elementary, 578. (Pictured at left – Popp's Ferry Elementary School)

The assessed valuation of the taxable property in the Biloxi Municipal Separate School District in 1961 was \$28,000,000.00. In 1968, it was \$50,607,642.00.

At the end of the school year in 1960, Superintendent Gycelle Tynes resigned, and longtime Biloxi administrator Robert D. Brown was named to succeed him. Mr. Brown had served as teacher and principal and then assistant superintendent in the Biloxi schools. Assistant superintendent Lawrence Buford had resigned, and Dr. Bill Lee, formerly of the Columbus schools, became assistant superintendent. Earl Skinner was named principal of Biloxi High School following the resignation of Frank Warnock; Mrs. Catherine Clower and R.O. George were Biloxi High School assistant principals.

Construction work was highlighted by the addition to the school system of the new Biloxi Senior High School building on Father Ryan Avenue, costing more than one-and one-half million dollars. Perhaps *Daily Herald* reporter Jim Lund put it best when he wrote, on February 25, 1961: "Friday at 3:30 p.m. the 49-year-old Biloxi High School died. Wednesday morning at 8:30 a.m. the new Biloxi High School will be born." Teachers and students began a two-day move



from the old building on East Howard Avenue to the new structure that would serve the city's high school students for the next forty years. When the old high school had been built, Lund wrote, it was designed to house 300 students; the new high school was built to accommodate 1500 students, about 600 more than were currently enrolled. Principal Earl Skinner said that he hoped the

transition to the new school would go smoothly, without losing a single step in the education of Biloxi High students. Although some heavy equipment and furnishings were moved from Howard Avenue to Father Ryan, about 85 percent of the furnishings were new. Under construction for more than a year, the school was occupied as soon as it could be used, shortly after the beginning of the second semester of the school year. Some of the building remained incomplete—the band, vocal music, homemaking, and physical education sites—but all classroom wings and the cafeteria were finished.

Biloxi High School was the largest and most expensive of the thirteen projects in the long-range building program for the district that had been initiated in 1958. It was with a great deal of pride that Superintendent R.D. Brown spoke of the schools to civic clubs in 1960 as "the best in the state." Though that was, of course, a not entirely objective view, it was true that the extensive building program, the higher salaries attracting better qualified staff, the exceptionally broad curriculum, and the strong leadership of this period produced an outstanding school system recognized throughout the state as one of the most progressive and best operated school districts in Mississippi.

It also seemed true to those most closely involved in the schools that students enrolling in the Biloxi schools as transfers were receiving educational opportunities that compared favorably with those of schools in California or Massachusetts or Indiana or other states throughout the nation. And Biloxi teachers were certainly in an excellent position to make such comparisons, since the school population was composed of an exceptionally large percentage of transfer students from other states.

Superintendent Brown in 1965 made his annual report to the State Department of Education, in which he presented the following selected data that served to describe the district in some detail:

	<u>1963-64</u>	<u>1964-65</u>
1. Beginning enrollment	8, 814	8,830
2. Entered from other states	704	819
3. Transfers within the district	348	257
4. Transfers from Mississippi schools	403	358
5. Transfers from non-public schools	39	14
6. Total number of pupils enrolled (does not include item #3)	9,960	10,021

The 1960s were for the entire country a time of supreme effort, calling for the most energetic and creative attempts to deal with urgent national problems and demanding that Americans everywhere find the inner resources to meet the challenges they faced. The concentration of those energies and efforts was clearly reflected in local programs and attitudes.

With notice of changes that were inevitable, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare wrote the Biloxi schools in January 1963 that local public schools which were segregated on the basis of race were not deemed suitable under law for children of military-connected families. In a joint meeting with the Gulfport School Board, together with attorneys, the Board attempted to find possible solutions that would both satisfy federal officials and comply with existing state laws involving segregated schools.

Among the choices the Board presented as ideas to be considered were the construction of a school on the Keesler military base exclusively for children of military families or the leasing of a Biloxi school by the federal government for those children or other various staffing and enrollment proposals. Discussion also included plans for meeting with state Attorney General Joe T. Patterson to consider those proposals and to determine which might be acceptable and still operate under state law. The minutes report that "a decision had no sooner been reached when a call was received saying that the Department of Justice was bringing suit against the Biloxi Municipal Separate School District" (Minutes 4484).

All of this—and far more—was mere preliminary to what was to come for the Biloxi schools as its people, both black and white, struggled with problems centered in race that had so long seemed to many people to be the single most defining characteristic of the South in general and Mississippi in particular. The move by the federal government had been matched by a suit brought by Biloxians, led by civil rights advocate and NAACP leader Dr. Gilbert Mason. It would be this suit that resulted in the desegregation of the Biloxi schools the following year.

Biloxians could read in the *Daily Herald* of July 15, 1964, a rather crude headline that was the caption for events that would forever change the life of the Biloxi schools: "Biloxi School Mix Plan Is Submitted." The story began with the announcement that desegregation of the Biloxi schools would begin in the coming school year, with first grade classes to be integrated.

It is historically noteworthy that the Biloxi schools were the first public schools in the state to desegregate classrooms, and the process leading up to that momentous day had been complicated and lengthy. No one had a better inside view and historical perspective than Dr. Gilbert Mason, whose son was the lead plaintiff in the Biloxi school desegregation suit. The Biloxi physician was well known, not only in the local community but throughout the state, for his leadership role in the Biloxi branch of the NAACP. He had led the "wade-ins" to desegregate the whites-only beach in Biloxi in 1960, with resulting violent opposition that had reaped unwanted national attention from the point of view of city officials. In his book, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots*, written with James

Patterson Smith, Dr. Mason recounts a personal view of school desegregation that is at the same time both chilling and hopeful.

From 1961, when the Biloxi branch of the NAACP began petitioning the Biloxi School Board to desegregate the schools, until 1963, when the suit was filed in federal court, Dr. Mason writes that efforts were made to achieve agreement with the Board to prepare a good faith plan to end the dual system of schools that had been demonstrably unequal throughout Mississippi history.

He tells of events and attitudes and principles that drove the determination to end segregated schools in the community, pointing to the totally inadequate school equipment and supplies, the second-hand books and lab equipment, the failure to provide classes in art and music and vocational courses and higher level math and science courses and foreign languages that white schools had—and a mountain of other reasons that he and Mrs. Mason and others could not tolerate without doing something to change the school world of not only his son and other black children but all the children of Biloxi. He writes:

I believed that sound educational principles demanded that the school reflect the society in which we live. I still believe this. I held strongly the dream of one America. My personal philosophy that we are all God's children demanded that we all—red and yellow, black and white—learn to understand and tolerate one another. I abhorred segregation and all that it stood for. The law of the land said that Jim Crow had to go. I for one was ready to invoke the law on behalf of my son and others similarly situated to see that they got their lawful opportunity, as the courts said, 'with all deliberate speed.' So it was in 1960, soon after our son started to the first grade in Biloxi's all-black Perkins Elementary school, we began the long process of petitioning and negotiating with the Board for our rights under the Fourteenth Amendment as interpreted in the 1954 *Brown* decision. Three years later, the Biloxi Municipal School System became the first school system in Mississippi to send black and white children to school together. (Mason 146)

In *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots*, Dr. Mason tells a continuing story of resistance to desegregation, from Superintendent Brown and members of the Board, though over time, he notes, "we discovered some spirits of moderation among the school board members. Mrs. Dudley Andrews, for example, was friendly and had an open mind. Dr. Peter Pavlov, a white dentist who treated both black and white patients in an office with nonsegregated waiting room, was sort of a moderate. Dr. J.A. Graves, the board's president when we filed suit, was also a moderate. Mr. C.T. Switzer, Sr., was harder to read . . ." (Mason 150). In general, he concludes, meetings were moderate to friendly in tone, and he notes that especially after Mayor Danny Guice took office, the desire to handle things peacefully was clear. Businesses wanted no more bad publicity; tourism people didn't relish the idea of a continuing negative image; Keesler officials were also a force for moderation and the easing of racial tension.

It is instructive to note that in 1963 there were over 3,000 public school districts in the South and border states, and only slightly more than one-third had any integration, much of that only token. In Mississippi not a single public school district had even token desegregation.

Behind the headlines of July and August of 1964 was a story with a history as long as that of the state itself, but the more immediate history began in June 1963, when the case of *Gilbert R. Mason, Jr., et al. Vs. Biloxi Municipal School District* was filed in federal court. With the state attorney general and other officials fighting against the desegregation suit, on June 17, 1963, Judge Sidney Mize dismissed the case of the *United States v. Biloxi Municipal Separate School District, No. 2643*; and on June 29, 1963, he entered an order dismissing the case of *Mason et al. v. Biloxi Municipal Separate School District, No. 2696*.

In a letter to the Board from Thomas H. Watkins of Watkins and Eager law firm in Jackson, Watkins foresaw that appeals by the plaintiffs would be upheld and that the school district would probably be ordered to submit integration plans to the district court to begin with the September 1964 school term. He was of course exactly right in his prediction.

Plaintiffs, led by young Mason's father, immediately appealed the ruling to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, asking for an injunction against the schools. The appeal was denied, pending ruling of the Court of Appeals. On February 4, 1964, Judge Mize's ruling was reversed. Under a preliminary injunction issued by the Fifth Circuit Court in March, later made permanent, the Biloxi schools were ordered to end school segregation and to make arrangements to provide nondiscriminatory schools—with all deliberate speed (Mason 154). Leake County and Jackson schools were also ordered to desegregate, but it happened that the Biloxi schools opened earlier than the others that year.

The plan submitted by the Board after the Fifth Circuit ruling included the statement that "the maintenance of separate schools for Negro and white children of said school district shall be completely ended with respect to the first grade" during the coming year. According to the *Herald* story, the School Board and administrative staff and attorneys had been investigating and studying plans of other schools in other states since March 4, when the Board was ordered to submit a plan to end desegregated schools. Enrollment figures, the story concluded, showed 6,914 white children and 1,255 colored.

Biloxi teachers met in a general faculty meeting on Wednesday, August 26, with Superintendent Brown welcoming the 362 white faculty members at Biloxi High School. He urged teachers to work together for the good of the children of Biloxi, noting in his usual matter-of-fact way that "education is an ever-changing thing" (Skelton, *Mississippi Teacher* 77). Among members of the faculty and in the community generally there was some real apprehension, some deep fear that incidents would occur that would indelibly scar the children themselves and forever taint the city. After all, this was at the end of what the national press had called "Mississippi Summer," and the deaths of three young civil rights workers near Philadelphia was the clearest and most recent image of Mississippi in the minds of most Americans.

On August 31, 1964, this time with the headline "First Grade At Biloxi Integrated," the newspaper reported the beginning of the end of race-segregated Biloxi schools with the enrollment of sixteen black children:

The children—12 girls and four boys—arrived at the schools on a staggered schedule for the opening day of classes. First graders attend only half-day of school for the first six weeks.

Superintendent R.D. Brown announced at 10:05 a.m. that the last two of the Negroes, those at Jeff Davis, had arrived and were assigned to classes.

The Negroes arrived on time for the first classes at Gorenflo and DuKate, a little later at Lopez and shortly before 10 at Jeff Davis.

The breakdown of Negroes by schools: Gorenflo, seven; DuKate, four; Lopez, three; and Jeff Davis, two.

Supt. Brown said that there were no incidents reported at any of the schools involved.

Today was the first day of classes for over 7,500 pupils attending the public schools. ("First Grade At Biloxi Integrated" 1) [Note: The enrollment figure was for the first day of attendance. Total enrollment for the year was substantially higher than this.]

As planned by the city and school district officials, newsmen and cameramen were prevented from taking pictures of the arrival of the students or during the day, and precautions were taken through the assignment of extra police personnel, FBI agents, and federal marshals in the vicinity of the schools. Representatives of major news organizations—the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and TV networks—were in Biloxi to report the event.

And because of the foresight of the Board and city officials and federal officers, reinforced by the planning of Dr. Mason and the people who worked most closely with him, the integration of the first grade took place without any openly adverse reaction or regrettable incident.

The entire community breathed a collective sigh of relief and could justifiably take pride in the fact that common sense and decency and responsible leadership had helped Biloxi weather a storm that had roiled the waters of public policy and too long drowned efforts to communicate and cooperate and move forward.

While the court order had required a plan for integrating one grade in 1964, it also had required that the School Board submit plans to dismantle the segregated system by integrating at least one grade each year after that. Only a short while later, the Court ordered the Biloxi schools to make plans for integrating three additional grades in 1965 and to end the dual school system in 1967.

Under the new plan submitted by the Board, the first, second, third, and twelfth grades were ordered to integrate classes at the beginning of the 1965-1966 school year. For many people, integration of the senior class seemed to involve potential problems that integration of the elementary classes had not posed. These were young adults, old enough to have been made more fully aware of what divided them. How would the students react? For that matter, would there be any different reaction from members of the white community?

Biloxi High School principal Earl Skinner met with the high school faculty in the second day of a three-day workshop before students were scheduled for the first day of classes. The senior class, teachers were told, was scheduled to meet in the auditorium before school began on the first day of school. The two other classes would meet separately in the gymnasium. Afterward, the students would go to their homerooms to receive handbooks and locker assignments and listen to announcements before moving to their first period classes.

Mr. Skinner assured the faculty that everything was being done to see that classes proceeded on schedule and without interruption. The administration did not foresee any problems. All the new black students would be seniors. Nobody in the faculty knew how they would arrive, how many there would be, who they were, nor in whose classes they would be enrolled.

It seemed part of an effort to see that the whole matter was treated in a business-as-usual fashion. Teachers at that time never received class rosters ahead of time in those pre-computer days. This year would be no different (Skelton 80-82).

On September 2, 1965, Biloxi High School was desegregated, with the *Herald* reporting the story that afternoon in the matter-of-fact style of publisher Eugene Wilkes and editor Cosman Eisendrath and reporter Jim Lund, all of whom served as the reasonable and calm voice of the community:

Under court orders to integrate the first, second, third, and twelfth grades, Biloxi Municipal Separate School District today admitted Negroes for the first time to Biloxi High School and to Beauvoir and Fernwood Elementary Schools.

Seven Negroes, four boys and three girls, attended an early assembly and full-day schedule of classes at Biloxi High School, where officials said they were experiencing a normal opening day. The seven Negro students arrived at Biloxi High School about 8 a.m. in two automobiles which let them out in front and left. A few minutes later they joined other senior students for an opening day assembly in the auditorium. (*Herald*, September 2, 1965)

Later the newspaper reported Superintendent Brown's words: "We expected a normal day of school and we are having one." That was simply the way it was; no more need be said.

The black community had no doubt staked a great deal on those seven young people who entered Biloxi High School that morning, into a world that was in so many ways new to them. Perhaps they walked alone into the building, but they were in fact never alone. Biloxi teachers cared deeply

about every child in the school and about the school itself. They wanted those children to succeed. And they wanted nothing to hurt the students or the school and find its way into television sets around the world. Though that attitude, at least in part, may sound defensive, it seemed to many Biloxians at the time that the national media took satisfaction in stories that pitted people against people, showing the worst side of a nation deeply troubled (Skelton, 84, 85).

The Sixties also brought to the Biloxi Public Schools an almost unbroken series of honors won by Biloxi students. The list is impossible to complete, but it is important to note that those honors represented a new involvement by the Biloxi schools in the total educational life of state, regional and national groups. Biloxi students won state presidencies of such organizations as the State Association of Student Councils, the State Future Homemakers of America, the Junior Classical League, the Junior Academy of Science, Patriotic American Youth, and other organizations. In addition, Biloxi students won state, regional, and national honors in every academic field, including many National Merit Scholarship finalists and several Presidential Scholars.

Administrators and Board members were strong advocates of an expanded curriculum and curricular innovations that resulted in the high school's having the broadest curriculum among state schools.

Looking back at the schools from today's perspective, one is struck by some of the more restrictive rules that were put in place by the Board and the administration during this period. For example, the policy on married students, as shown in the minutes of August 19, 1963, required that married students register with counselors, that secret marriages could result in expulsion, that pregnant students must withdraw, and that married students could not hold school offices. The policy was a reflection of other kinds of restrictive rules that governed hair length and other items of behavior or dress or appearance and that occupied a great deal of attention and time from teachers during these years.

A musical group from Biloxi High School called "Substantial Evidence" requested permission from the Board on August 19, 1968, to wear long hair in the schools. "Hair styles for males" were discussed by the administration and the Board. It was a matter that would not go away, as students attempted in various creative ways to get around the rule, a few of them sometimes resorting to wearing wigs. On September 20, 1971, the Board considered a report from John Hartman of the Mississippi School Boards Association that included a compilation of regulations governing hair and dress in state schools. Also on September 20, 1971, a delegation of male students asked the Board for a revision of the policy governing hair styles—but it would not be until later that the rules were relaxed in the long-standing battle over hair.

Gradually over the years, the Biloxi schools have accommodated changes in fashion and dress and adapted to societal and governmental changes—but always with a fundamental and unbroken commitment to providing the best environment possible for the students in Biloxi schools. And that

has always included determined efforts to keep the schools safe, to provide uninterrupted time for teaching and learning, and to require adherence to Board policies and administrative rules that were made with thoughtful consideration and care.

Despite Biloxi's longtime reputation as a comparatively free and open city with an unwritten motto of "let the good times roll," the Biloxi schools have been a steadfast force for moderation and sound discipline that school districts in other cities would envy and would emulate if they could.

In 1965 the secondary schools of Biloxi underwent exhaustive self-evaluations prior to evaluations by committees representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The evaluations resulted in "AA" accreditation for all schools.

Portions of the reports dealing with Biloxi Senior High School, Central Junior High School, Fernwood Junior High School, and Nichols High School follow:

Schools holding membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools are required to make a self-study and be visited every ten years. The self-study by the secondary schools in the Biloxi Municipal Separate School District was made during the 1964-65 school year. The visit by the Committee for the Southern Association was made in two parts. The first part of the visit was held March 10, 11, and 12 of 1965 and studied all aspects of the Evaluative Criteria except instructional program. The second part of the visit studied the instructional program and was done on March 31, April 1 and 2 of 1965.

The self-study and evaluation involved Biloxi High School, Central Junior High School, Michel Junior High School, and Fernwood Junior High School (an evaluation of Nichols High School was made later during the same month). Each school did a self-study independent of the other three schools. The Visiting Committee evaluated the four schools as a unit and this report deals with the secondary schools of the Biloxi system as a unit. Each sub-committee with the exception of the Philosophy Committee was asked to structure their work by identifying the important element or aspects of the area they were assigned to. Each element or aspect was to be identified before actual visitation of the schools. The sub-committees were asked to treat each element or aspect separately by pointing out any strengths or weaknesses and to make suggestions for improvement. (*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Accreditation Report, 1965*)

The Visiting Committee, composed of professional educators from throughout the state and the Southeast region noted that programs of the Biloxi schools were in fact oriented to sound philosophies, with thoroughly comprehensive objectives.

In other statements, the Committee noted the effectiveness of the testing program of the Biloxi Public schools; the continuing and effective efforts to deal with a mobile school and community population; the development of an appropriate curriculum with widely diversified areas of instruction for Biloxi students; excellent recreational and athletic activities; a superior centralized business administration; and high commendations of the administration and the School Board in

foreseeing needs for modern, up-to-date school facilities and for long-range planning to house the tremendous growth in school enrollments during the preceding few years. Academic and extracurricular programs received high praise from the visiting educators, underlining the progress of the Biloxi Public Schools during the first half of the decade.

Building programs during the 1960s included a multi-purpose building in 1966-1967 at Michel, costing \$123,469, with J.O. Collins contractor and H.F. Fountain, Jr., architect. Additions to Popp's Ferry Elementary School and Jefferson Davis Elementary School were also made in 1968. A two-room addition was built for Gorenflo Elementary in 1968-1969. Some portable classroom units were purchased to accommodate growing enrollments at some of the schools during these years. A vocational building annex at Biloxi High School was built, with H.F. Fountain, Jr., architect (it was this building that would later be renovated and used as the Biloxi High School media center).

By September 1964, Biloxi High School had a new two-story addition to the building, only a little more than three years after the school opened. The addition included seven rooms, an enlarged and air-conditioned library, and an enlarged lunch room that accommodated three lines rather than the two lines previously in place. A teachers' lounge at the western end of the building was a welcome addition in the view of the faculty, who had been given only a small windowless room on the second floor of the building as the teachers' lounge in the original plans.

As desegregation began in the Biloxi schools, a new pre-school program, Head Start, was initiated. First operated by the district, Project Head Start was a federal program described as part of the nation's "initial step in the war on poverty."

The Biloxi district was among the first school districts to be given the opportunity to develop Head Start. With Glendon Johnson as director, the program employed a professional staff of 56, with a total of 128 persons involved. In July 1965, when registration was opened, 600 children were registered for the program ("Curriculum Comments," July 1965).

School personnel across the nation during this period were discussing the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the likelihood of a national testing program that would include appropriate measures to be adopted for objective measurements of student achievement. The role of the United States Office of Education was expanding rapidly under the new federal legislation, and first steps were being taken to implement a national assessment of student achievement and the effectiveness of programs in meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children ("Curriculum Comments" 2).

In view of the current discussion of new state assessment programs in 2001 and the potential difficulties involved, it seems appropriate to refer to an article written thirty-six years ago by the highly respected assistant superintendent of the Biloxi schools, Dr. Bill Lee.

Responding to news that the Carnegie Foundation was providing one-million dollars for the purpose of developing a nation-wide test to measure educational progress in various communities, Dr. Lee addressed the issue in a report to the staff. His references are to a project funded by Carnegie called "Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education," with Dr. Ralph Tyler, of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford as director:

1. I sincerely believe that whatever is learned by the children is the result of the kinds of teachers that are placed in the classroom. I have often used the figure 95 percent (out of a hat) of the learning is dependent upon individual teachers. The other 5 percent is dependent upon teaching materials, administration, etc. The amount learned by the pupil from textbooks is only a small portion of the total learning process. Much of the learning comes about as a by-product of informal situations in the classrooms. Your project [nation-wide curricular proposals] means that all of us must be on Page 76 by Thanksgiving Holidays.

2. We have just now reached the point where we have convinced our teachers that tests are administered for the purpose of measuring achievement in children, not teachers. This misconception by teachers was a result of administrators misusing test results in order to judge the teachers. This project, under Dr. Tyler, will defeat the very purpose of a testing program. Unprofessional administrators will measure their teachers and cause teachers to resort to unprofessional conduct.

3. The National Teachers Examination is now being given nation-wide for the purpose of measuring one phase of a teacher's ability. Few professional educators will agree that teachers should be selected on the basis of this test alone. How then can any group design one test that will measure the quality of teaching, the value of teaching materials, and all other areas vitally important to total educational growth?

4. The National Merit Test is given throughout this country on a volunteer basis. I know personally of many situations where citizens question the quality of educational systems on the basis of the number of National Merit Scholars produced. I shudder to think about the type of questions this community will ask if the Biloxi District ranks below the top ten school districts in the United States.

5. The one thing that has made America a great country is that we are permitted to think differently, talk differently, and teach differently. I for one, will make sure that our school system scores well on this national test, but in order to do so I must teach what the test tests. In the same manner prescribed by other successful schools this in effect will bring about a standardized national curriculum with all schools teaching the same, trying to turn out the same products regardless of their abilities, desires, or aspirations.

6. If our school ranks poorly on this scale, then those people in the community who do not understand what tests mean will demand abrupt and unwarranted changes whether the professional educators agree or disagree with the type of curriculum necessary for this community.

7. The various reliable testing companies have assured us that the samples they use to establish norms are statistically reliable and valid. I have reason to believe that should this project be successful, it will refute the evidence provided by these firms.

8. I strongly believe that our testing program will be injured severely as a result of the publicity that this project will receive. I would think that huge grants require the researcher to find a positive solution. Frankly, I can assure you that we can find a great many solutions to our problems with a million dollars. "Curriculum Comments," July 1965)

In 1965 district personnel began the Biloxi Teachers Federal Credit Union, a successful venture that provided both saving and lending services to district staff members. With administrative assistant Bob Cherry spearheading the project, the Credit Union was housed in the central administrative office building. Betty Jean Covich Hughes was treasurer of the Credit Union from the beginning; she succeeded Harold Boykin as manager of the business soon after it began. (*See "Biographies" Section.*) A number of members of the faculty and the support staff have served as Board members over the years. For the past twenty-six years Mrs. Charlotte Breal has assisted Mrs. Hughes in the daily operation of a business that today has assets of approximately four-million dollars. (*Pictured – Bob Cherry, instrumental in founding the Biloxi Teachers Federal Credit Union*)



Under the particular creative leadership of Assistant Superintendent Dr. Bill Lee, the mid- and late 1960s saw an extraordinary growth of innovative programs, such as the Biloxi Education Enrichment Services (BEES) programs; summer inservice programs for teachers that brought black and white faculty members in small subject- or grade-centered groups to work together on curriculum and instructional matters for the first time; a far-reaching evening adult education program that offered both basic education and special interest classes; use of the high school as a center for University of Southern Mississippi Biloxi Resident Center classes; an innovative linguistics program that was introduced in two elementary schools as a pilot program and which eventually extended into other grades and schools; an ever-growing cooperation with the community in use of facilities, as, for example, organizations like the Gulf Coast Symphony and Community Concerts and civic clubs and outside groups used the new Biloxi High School auditorium, with its excellent acoustics and comfortable seating arrangements; noteworthy curricular expansion; and a host of other programs that built on the creativity and expertise of

Biloxi teachers. (It is interesting to note that the BEES program was an early move looking toward eventual team teaching and non-graded classes, with laboratories for teachers to permit greater individualized instruction.)

One of those programs beginning in 1966 was a Title IV federal grant under PL-88-352, providing funds for an inservice project for 401 professional staff members. Meetings were held on Saturdays and in the evenings, with Dr. James McPhail of the University of Southern Mississippi as coordinator. At least part of the underlying purpose of the project was to bring about closer working relationships between the previously separate black and white faculties in early days of desegregation. Meeting in large-group sessions, the Biloxi teachers participated in programs presented by consultants from other areas of the country, authors, well-known school administrators, civil rights leaders, motivational speakers. The remainder of the half-day sessions would be devoted each Saturday to specific topics or college level courses, with smaller sections based on disciplines or grade levels. A single topic would be the focus of each meeting, with each group discussing the subject—such as grading or discipline or instructional materials--and reaching conclusions resulting in recommendations to the administration.

The budget for the 1965-1966 school year was \$3,180,265.27 as the city significantly expanded in area and population in 1965 by taking in land extending to Debuys Road.

The Biloxi schools continued to operate under the federal court order which permitted school choices so long as desegregation guidelines were met, guidelines that required some assignment of black students to schools that were not in their families' neighborhoods. To the relief of the Board and the administration, massive busing was not required, and in 1968 the schools could continue to assign students, as Board minutes show, based on "their moral, physical, and educational life."

As early as 1966 the district was already thinking of computers, joining with the Gulfport School District to apply for funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for a computer center to be located in Biloxi.

Other building renovation and repair needs were met on what seemed to be a regularly occurring basis. One of the old school buildings, Dukate, was inspected and found wanting; the Board voted in September 1968 to abandon the old school as obsolete and deteriorated to the point that it should no longer be used as a school and that it should be abandoned, though the date for that abandonment was set at June 30, 1970.

As the end of the 1960s neared, R.D. Brown was superintendent; Dr. Bill Lee was assistant superintendent; and Olon Ray was administrative assistant. Principals in the schools were Earl Skinner, Bruce Stewart, T.J. Smith, John Mattox, C.J. Duckworth, James Duncan, Ivon May, Alva Walker, F.E. Hood, W.C. Lott, Glendon Johnson, Lusta Prichard, Horace Flake, George Bullock, and later Frank Sabbatini and Claude Harrison.



A.J. Holloway was business manager for the schools, having been employed after November 21, 1966, when John McDermott resigned the position after having held it for eleven years. (*Pictured – A.J. Holloway*)

The most devastating natural disaster in the history of the schools occurred on August 17, 1969, when Hurricane Camille hit the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Incalculable damage was done to the entire Mississippi Gulf Coast, with so many lives that were lost and businesses destroyed and hopes and ambitions put on hold or abandoned. The schools were used as storm shelters for hundreds of Biloxians and later as clothing and food distribution sites and bivouac centers for military personnel detailed to assist the community for protection and clean-up.

Damage to the Biloxi schools, Superintendent Brown reported on September 5, was probably near the \$1-million mark. Talking with Jim Lund, *Herald* reporter, he said, "My earlier estimate of \$500,000 damage covers only about half of it." The Board authorized the superintendent to proceed as needed in advertising for repairs and for continuing meetings with HEW officials. Fernwood, Jefferson Davis, Dukate, and Nichols sustained heavy roof damage, with all schools having some damage. A window wall, the gym floor, and some partition walls at Biloxi High School were also damaged.

Architect John Collins was employed to inspect the damages and to work with the administration to get repairs completed. Teams of state and federal officials were organized to inspect the schools on the Coast and to make recommendations regarding repairs and subsequent use. State Superintendent of Education Garvin Johnston reported that the state would assume local contributions to the normal operating budgets of school districts heavily affected by the storm; the amount due from local districts as their share of the minimum education program funds could then be used for repairs.

The opening of the Biloxi schools for the 1969 session was delayed from the scheduled September 2 beginning until September 15. During the remainder of August and through the following month, the Board and the administration were forced to deal with the effects of the storm, not the least of which involved seeking federal assistance for clean-up and repair and untangling the resulting complexities of insurance coverage. In addition to the damages the school plants had suffered, there was also a pressing need to clean the schools before students and staff would be able to use the buildings. If all the schools could not be made ready for the September 15 opening, the Board and administration decided that double-shifts might be necessary. It was unfortunate that soon after the storm, Mr. Brown was required to have surgery that necessitated his being out of the schools for a short period. During that interim, the Board on October 14, 1969, appointed Olon Ray as acting superintendent in what would be a predictor for the future.

It was a troubling time for everyone, in particular for the Board and the administration faced with daily demands on their time and energy and planning skills, but the community and the schools

would recover. On November 4, 1969, the Board began a long-range study of school needs and the future.

By all objective standards, Biloxi students' educational achievements compared very favorably with those of students throughout the United States. The Board of Trustees and the administration conscientiously made every effort to anticipate school needs and to provide the services, equipment, personnel, and supervision that would keep the schools moving toward even more pronounced excellence. Teachers found challenging and rewarding experiences in the rich diversity of backgrounds of Biloxi students, whose families had often traveled widely and who had often lived in other states and countries. Faculty personnel also brought to their teaching a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, interests, and training. It is appropriate here to reemphasize the highly mobile population of the local community, even more acutely reflected in the city's schools. While only one person may be transferred to or from Keesler Air Force Base, for example, this single transfer might affect several children in the family's move.

Among the significant features of the Biloxi Public Schools at this time were an expanding and well-planned vocational program; a superior program in reading; speech therapy and health services; coordinated academic and extracurricular programs of much merit; continuing upgrading of staff members through workshops, institutes, and higher degree programs; a course of studies reflecting exceptionally broad selections and class experiences; and long-range planning to maintain the high standards.

According to a report by Biloxi School Board president Fred Carron, the Biloxi school system operated a plant with buildings and contents worth more than \$8-million, with a budget for 1969 of \$4,135,000. The school cafeteria program served over one-million lunches a year and some 100,000 meals were provided in the free and reduced lunch program. While the average Mississippi student cost per year was \$346, Biloxi spent \$364 per student. Federal aid amounted to \$1,669,000 to help educate students under the federally-impacted areas program for the year. Construction was currently underway on the \$114,000 metal trades building at the Biloxi Senior High School campus; and an increasing emphasis on vocational programs had resulted in a broad expansion of vocational-technical education for students in the Biloxi Public Schools.

Other noteworthy aspects of the schools included coordinated elementary programs of physical education, vocal music, and guidance; a stringed instrument program, together with traditional band and choral music; remedial and developmental reading programs; school health services and regularly employed school nurses; an extensive homebound program for students who were ill or otherwise absent from school because of other reasons; a comprehensive adult education program, including General Educational Development (GED) preparedness courses, basic education, elementary courses, and evening division high school courses leading to a high school diploma; a hard-of-hearing program for students in conjunction with other Coast districts; summer remedial and enrichment programs; a central media center serving all schools and specializing in audio-

visual materials; increased counseling services; a variety of inservice programs for faculty members; and expanded on-the-job-training programs for vocational students.

Biloxi teachers were provided a sick leave plan allowing teachers to accumulate sick leave, beginning with a base leave for all teachers without loss of pay and including additional time with loss of only substitute pay.

At the end of the 1960s, the Biloxi schools had an enrollment of approximately 9,300 students, with 470 faculty members. All schools were rated "AA" by the Mississippi Accrediting Commission. Secondary schools were members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, all rated "AA" by the SACS.

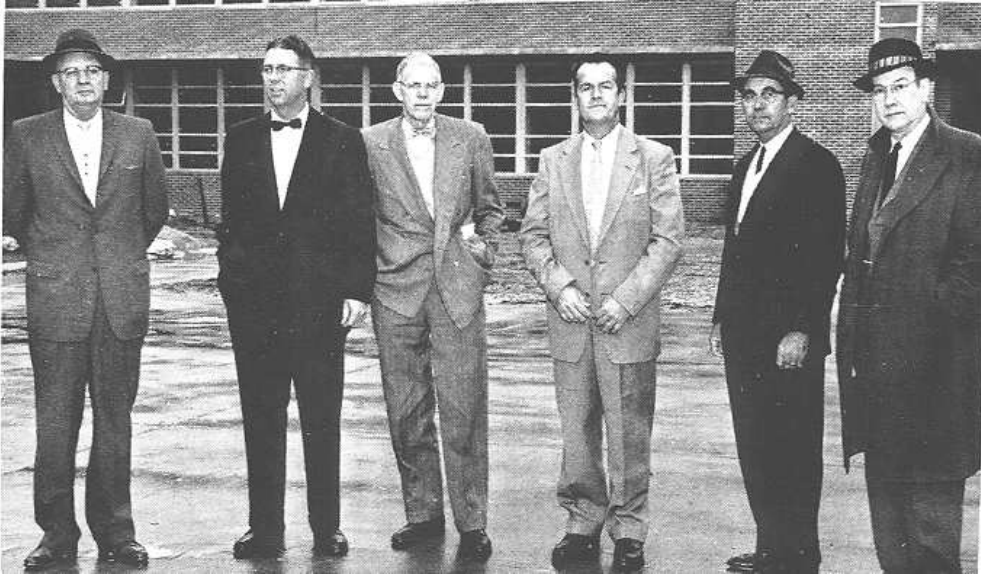
In 1969 T.J. Smith became principal of Biloxi High School. With an exceptionally broad background in history, psychology, guidance and counseling, physical education, and administration, he was to lead the high school for the next six years, providing the kind of administrative direction and commitment that would inspire both students and teachers to a record of exceptional achievement during his tenure.

It is of course true that every decade has had its own particular challenges and problems and trials and triumphs. But as the schools prepared to enter the 1970s, many people in Biloxi were convinced that the 1960s had been the most memorable decade in the history of the Biloxi Public Schools.

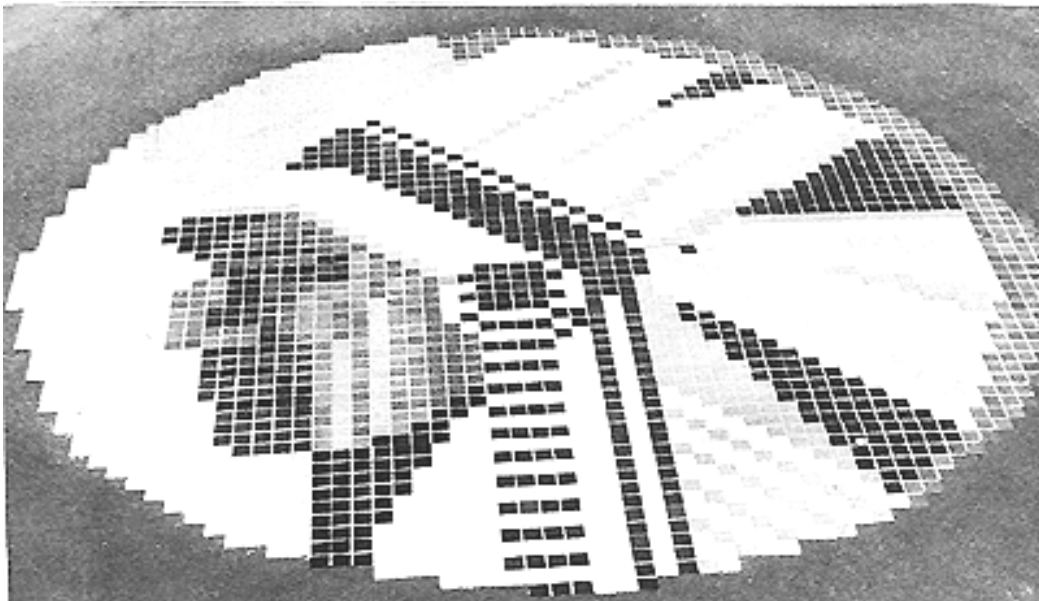
The years had produced the most remarkable changes not only in the facilities provided by the school district but also in the society as a whole and the student population and professional staff of the Biloxi Public Schools in particular.



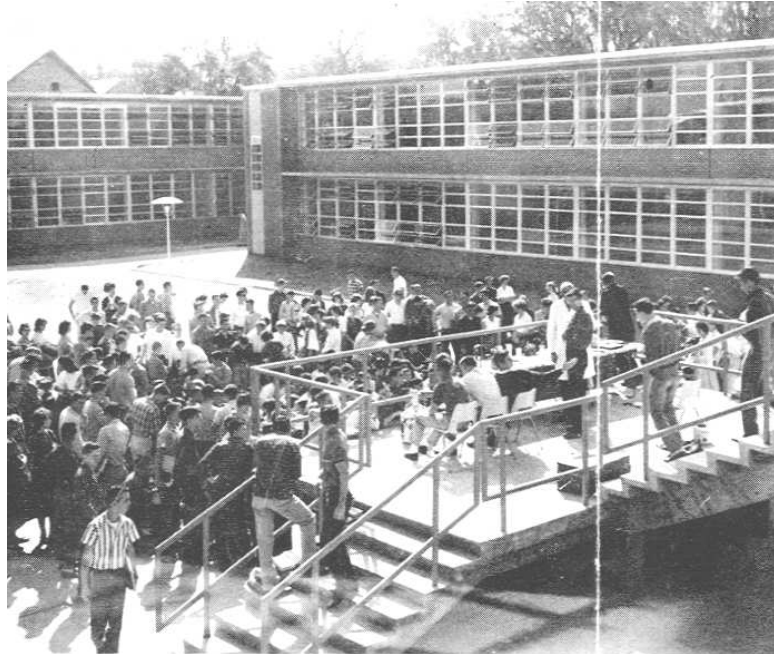
*A summer program at Jefferson Davis Elementary School,
with principal Glendon Johnson in 1969.*



*The Biloxi School Board and Superintendent – 1960
R.D. Brown, superintendent, C.T. Switzer, Sr., Glenn Swetman,
Peter Kuljis, Beverly Briscoe, Dr. J.A. Graves*



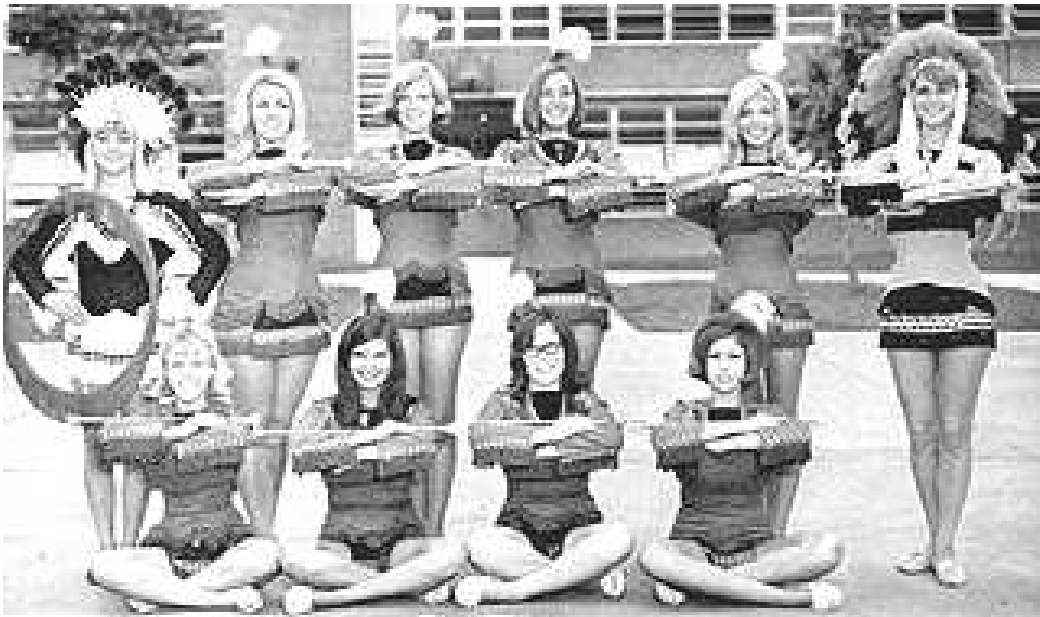
*The Indian Head in the courtyard of the new Biloxi High School,
which became for BHS students the center of a new tradition
and a continuing symbol of school spirit. It was placed in the courtyard in 1965.*



The Biloxi High School courtyard in the new school in the first month the school was used.



Administration Building in 1969



The 1967-68 Indian Band Majorettes – Standing – Connie Dalgo, Andrea Gilich, Sondra Parker, Susie King, Debra Ibele, Melanie Saucier, head majorette; seated – Sandy Morgan, Amy Dellenger, Terry Kelley, Janet Strangi.



Football head coach Willie D. Wiles and coaches T.J. Smith, Frank Sabbatini, , and Hillman Breland