



Thursday, July 14, 2011

## Foundation commits \$150,000 to expand Excel By 5

Excel By 5 Inc. announces its partnership with the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi (CFNM). CFNM will invest \$150,000 to expand Excel By 5 into Northwest Mississippi.

Excel By 5 will use the funds to provide a coordinator to work over the next three years with eight counties to improve early learning opportunities.

"This is a demonstration of our commitment to the children of Northwest Mississippi and it will have far-reaching impacts," said Ishmell Edwards and Greg Taylor, CFNM board members. "Excel By 5 engages families and communities by promoting best practices in early learning, child development, and education."

Communities within the counties of Coahoma, DeSoto, Marshall, Panola, Quitman, Tallahatchie, Tate and Tunica will be invited to participate in the Excel By 5 certification process. Crystal Blackmon has been named as the new Excel By 5 sites coordinator for the region.

"We're honored to have CFNM as our most recent partner," said Excel By 5 president Steve Renfroe. "It has been very encouraging to see the enthusiasm communities have for their youngest citizens. We certainly look forward to working with the community foundation."

Excel By 5 is working in 26 other Mississippi communities. Petal, West Point, Pascagoula, Mid-Jackson, Moss Point, Monroe County, Cleveland and Biloxi have already achieved Excel By 5 certification.

The Excel By 5 pilot was launched in 2004 with the support of First Lady Marsha Barbour, Chevron, Mississippi State Early Childhood Institute and the Phil Hardin Foundation. Excel By 5 has received additional support from the Walker Foundation, Mississippi Building Blocks, the Gilmore Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, through its support of the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation.

Excel By 5 sets forth a variety of standards involving parent training, community participation, child care and health to help communities focus on supporting young children and their families. The process usually takes two years to complete, and the certification is awarded for three years.

The first-of-its-kind in the United States, Excel By 5 is a collaborative model designed to help optimize existing resources while highlighting the important role communities play in educating their children during their most formative years – birth to five. Parents, educators, child care professionals, physicians, churches and social service organizations use the Excel By 5 model to form coalitions to achieve certification as a "child-friendly" community based on specific Excel By 5 standards.

The Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi is a nonprofit charitable organization with the mission of connecting people who care with causes that matter. Through the generosity of more than 1,000 donors, it has contributed \$5.2 million during the last six years to 200 nonprofit organizations in its eight-county region. The foundation's priorities are education, health and children and youth. All donations to the Community Foundation are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

To learn more about the work of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi go to <http://www.cfnm.org> or call 662.449.5002.