

# Building Pathways to Credentials and Careers

STRENGTHENING MISSISSIPPI'S WORKFORCE BY CONNECTING ADULTS  
TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS AND FAMILY-SUSTAINING CAREERS



Mississippi Economic Policy Center



## About the Mississippi Economic Policy Center

The Mississippi Economic Policy Center is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that conducts independent research on public policy issues affecting working Mississippians. Through public outreach efforts, policy maker education and engaging the media, MEPC uses its analysis to ensure that the needs of low and moderate-income Mississippians, in particular, are considered in the development and implementation of public policy with the ultimate goal of improving access to economic opportunity.

MEPC is managed by the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta/Hope Community Credit Union (ECD/HOPE), a regional financial institution and community development intermediary dedicated to strengthening communities, building assets and improving lives in economically distressed areas throughout the Mid South.

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....2

Chapter 1  
Background: Mississippi’s adults without postsecondary credentials.....3

Chapter 2  
Opportunities for adults to become college-ready .....4

Chapter 3  
Building partnerships & pathways: Overview of sector initiatives and career pathways .....6

Chapter 4  
State and regional models of sector initiatives and career pathways.....9

Conclusions and recommendations for connecting  
Mississippi’s adults to postsecondary credentials and careers .....12



# Executive Summary

Across Mississippi thousands of adults work hard each day to support their families and the communities in which they live. The determination and commitment of these adults is one of the state's greatest assets. However, many of these adults, particularly those without postsecondary experience, work in low-wage jobs without opportunities for advancement. More than 348,000 working-age adults in Mississippi have no formal education beyond high school, and almost 75 percent of Mississippi's working-age adults do not have a postsecondary degree. Connecting adults to postsecondary education and training prepares the state's residents and puts more Mississippians on a path to economic security.

Moving adults into postsecondary education ensures that the state's workforce is prepared to meet the demands of Mississippi employers. Occupations for workers with an associate degree are projected to grow by 19 percent from 2008 to 2018, a rate greater than any other educational grouping. As the need for workers with education beyond high school grows, Mississippi is at risk of having too few workers with necessary skills and, as a result, lagging in economic competitiveness.

Mississippi's leaders in postsecondary education, workforce development, secondary education, and industry as well as state and local leaders face a shared challenge—to build a more seamless pathway to postsecondary credentials for the state's adults that leads to career advancement and higher wages.

Beyond working adults, persisting to a postsecondary degree or certificate is imperative for Mississippi's high school graduates of today and tomorrow as well. Without postsecondary education, Mississippi's newest additions to the workforce will face diminishing opportunities for jobs that provide self-sufficiency wages. Over a 40 year work life, recent high school graduates that go on to receive an associate degree are projected to earn \$600,000 more than those who do not complete high school. Receiving a postsecondary degree can place Mississippi's youngest adults on a path to self-sufficiency.

This report uses data and analysis to further describe the wide range of Mississippians that stand to benefit from increased education and skills. It also proposes solutions for ensuring all groups- from low-skill adults, to recent high school graduates, to working adults looking to enhance skills- benefit from postsecondary education and workforce training and are better prepared to meet the demands of employers and find quality, family-sustaining jobs across Mississippi. The paper is broken into sections that present:

- A snapshot of working Mississippians without postsecondary credentials, and what these adults, and Mississippi, stand to gain from increased education and training.
- Opportunities available in Mississippi for low-skill adults to enhance skills and prepare for college level coursework and the built-in supports they need to be successful.
- Sector Initiatives: Prioritizing workforce needs while moving Mississippians towards postsecondary credentials and in-demand, quality careers.
- Career Pathways: Providing strong support services to postsecondary students and creating clear roadmaps of postsecondary courses that lead to in-demand, family-sustaining careers.
- Best practices in Sector Initiatives and Career Pathways: Models from Mississippi and beyond.

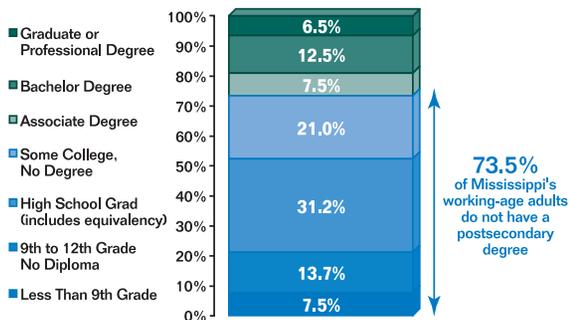
Members of the state's workforce - young and old - will need postsecondary education to support themselves and their families. Building strategies and pathways so these adults receive postsecondary credentials that prepare them for available jobs in their communities is one of the key steps for placing Mississippi, and its working adults, on a path to economic security and prosperity.

## BACKGROUND: MISSISSIPPI'S ADULTS WITHOUT POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

Over the last 30 years, workplace demands have driven more of Mississippi's adults to seek out postsecondary education. In 1979, 34 percent of the state's workforce had postsecondary experience. Today, more than half of the state's workers- 54 percent - have attended a postsecondary institution. However, 46 percent of Mississippi's labor force does not have formal schooling beyond high school.<sup>1</sup> For those working Mississippians without postsecondary experience, finding careers that offer economic security and job stability is becoming increasingly difficult. Attaining a postsecondary degree or certificate provides Mississippians with the opportunity to find employment in better quality, higher wage jobs and provides a more secure attachment to the workforce.

The value of additional education for working Mississippians is reflected in the state's wage data. Mississippians with some college or an associate's degree earn a median wage that is 17 percent higher than workers with no postsecondary experience, and the gap in wages widens to 36 percent for Mississippians that did not complete high school.<sup>2</sup> The wage discrepancy becomes even more prominent when considering a worker's lifetime earnings. Over a 40 year work life, workers with an associate degree are projected to earn \$600,000 more than those who do not complete high school.<sup>3</sup> Given the relationship between education and earnings, efforts to raise the educational attainment of Mississippi's workers, by strengthening connections between adult basic education, college level programs, and workforce training will positively affect the state's economic growth and competitiveness.

### Almost 75% of Mississippi's working-age adults do not have a postsecondary degree



Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2008 3-Year Averages

### Occupations requiring an associate degree projected to grow 19 percent from 2008 to 2018

Looking forward, the need for workers with degrees and credentials beyond high school will only become more pronounced. Occupations for workers with an associate degree are projected to grow by 19 percent from 2008 to 2018, a rate greater than any other educational grouping.<sup>4</sup> Occupations in the healthcare industry provide several examples of rapidly growing careers as registered nurses, dental hygienists, physical therapy assistants all require an associate degree and are expected to produce substantial job openings over the next 10 years. On a state level, Mississippi's State Workforce Investment Board reports that 80 percent of jobs now require additional training and education beyond high school.<sup>5</sup> As the need for workers with education beyond high school grows, Mississippi is at risk of having too few workers with necessary skills and, as a result, lagging nationally in economic competitiveness.

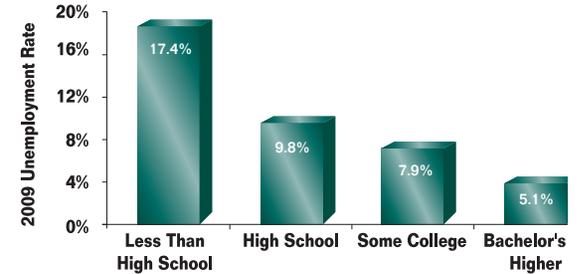
Meeting the dynamic skill needs of employers requires focusing efforts to increase educational attainment of Mississippi workers- young and old. Mississippi's hard working adults without a high school degree will need additional skills to have opportunities for jobs with self-sustaining wages. Strategies to increase adult college-readiness and postsecondary completion are imperative for low-skill adults of today and the future.

The 348,725 adults (age 25-54) in Mississippi with no formal education beyond high school measures more than 12 times the number of students who graduated from all MS high schools in 2009.<sup>6-7</sup>

### 1 in 6 Mississippi workers without a high school degree were unemployed in 2009

For many working adults, education attainment is also related to job stability. The current recession has magnified the attention on unemployment in the state, and job loss has not been experienced equally across education levels. During 2009, 1 in every 20 workers with a bachelor's degree was unemployed. Workers without a high school degree were substantially more likely to be unemployed, with 1 in 6 unemployed. Periods of unemployment can be harmful to families both emotionally and financially, particularly for families headed by low-skill, low-wage workers struggling to make ends meet. Higher educational attainment can lead to stability in both employment and income that is important for hardworking Mississippians on a path to economic security.

### Unemployment lower for Mississippians with college experience



Source: Economic Policy Institute Analysis of Current Population Survey

### African American and white Mississippians equally represented among the population without a high school degree

By taking a more in-depth look at the educational attainment of the state's adults, a clearer picture emerges of Mississippians potentially benefiting from increased skills and college credentials. The table below illustrates that 39.6 percent of white adults ended their formal education in high school, compared to 53.9 percent of African American adults. However, the number of white and African American adults without a high school degree is almost equal. For the two racial groups, close to 85,000 adults have not received a high school degree or equivalent. The large number of white and African American adults without a high school degree underscores how important it is to prepare more low-skilled adults to transition into college-level courses.<sup>8</sup>

### Educational attainment of adults ages 25-54 by race, MS, 2008

	White	African American
No high school diploma/GED	12.3%	19.7%
High school diploma/GED Only	27.3%	34.2%
Some post secondary education (no degree)	24.8%	24.8%
Associate degree or higher	35.7%	21.3%
Number of Adults with no high school diploma/GED	84,215	86,180

Source: Working Poor Families Project, Population Reference Bureau, analysis of 2008 American Community Survey

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS TO BECOME COLLEGE-READY

A study of adult students (25+ years) with, at most, a high school education found that there is a ‘tipping point’ in community college education where low-skill adult students receive the greatest wage benefit. The tipping point occurred when students received one year of college credits and a credential. Compared to students with less than 1 year of college, those with 1 year of credit and credential had annual earnings that averaged \$7,250 higher for students who started without a high school credential and \$4,150 higher for students starting with a GED or high school diploma.<sup>9</sup>

Adults persisting to the tipping point received substantial wage gains. However, the study found that less than 1/3 of ABE and GED students made the transition to college-level courses, and less than 6 percent ended up reaching the tipping point within five years.<sup>10</sup> Very few low-skill students were able to persist far enough to realize the wage gains from postsecondary education.

For low-skill Mississippians of working age looking to increase wages through education, the pathway begins in the community colleges and the state’s Workforce Investment Network.

### Community colleges and college readiness

Mississippi’s 15 community colleges are a main entry point for students seeking postsecondary education and training. Colleges do not just serve students that are ready to take college-level courses. For adults who did not graduate from high school or need remediation in the areas of basic math, reading, and writing, community colleges are a key provider of courses to bring students to a college-ready level.

### Opportunities for Getting Low-skill Adults College-Ready

Adult Basic Education (ABE)	Designed for adults with literacy and math skills on a middle or high school level. Students take the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) and are placed in 1 of 6 skill levels. Courses help adults improve literacy skills and move towards GED preparation and college-readiness. ABE courses are taught in the 15 community colleges, 11 public schools, community organizations, and correctional institutions.
GED Preparation and Testing	Provides adults without a high school diploma the opportunity to demonstrate that they have knowledge and skills equivalent to a high school diploma. Courses are designed to prepare students to take each of the 5 GED subjects tests.
Developmental Education	Mandated for university and community college students who need additional preparation before beginning college-level classes. Students take remedial courses in basic areas such as math, reading, science, and english that are required but do not count towards a final degree. These courses are an important link for underprepared students, but can extend the amount of time needed to complete a degree.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED preparation courses are an invaluable link for adults that seek to increase skills and receive a high school credential. ABE providers serve a wide range of students, many of which are adults seeking to upgrade skills and eventually receive a GED. ABE subjects range from low-level literacy to math and reading courses. Courses are offered free of charge at a diverse range of locations including community colleges and WIN Job Centers.

### Training opportunities through the state’s Workforce Investment Network

Outside of the community college system, other training supports exist for Mississippi’s working adults. For working adults that are in low-wage jobs or struggling to find employment, Mississippi’s Workforce Investment Network (WIN) plays a critical role in providing information, support, and, in some cases, training to adults. Funded primarily through Workforce Investment Act funds (WIA), Mississippi has a network of 46 WIN Job Centers disbursed across 4 Workforce Investment Areas. From April 2008 to March of 2009, WIN Job Centers served over 37,000 adults in Mississippi.<sup>11</sup>

WIN Job Centers provide services sequenced in the order of core, intensive, and training services. Training services may be available to adults and dislocated workers who have received at least one core and one intensive service. Training is financially supported in one of two ways. One way is through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) that provide funds for adults to select courses from an approved list of education providers. Education providers include community colleges, universities, private instructors, and adult basic skills providers. In 2008, 2,625 adult workers and 1,452 dislocated workers received ITAs in Mississippi.<sup>12</sup>

## Supporting Mississippi's Nontraditional Students

As Mississippi seeks to connect adults with postsecondary credentials, additional efforts are needed to support the state's nontraditional students. In Mississippi, the majority of students in ABE are between ages 19 and 54 and beyond the traditional college pathway.<sup>13</sup>

### Characteristics of nontraditional students:

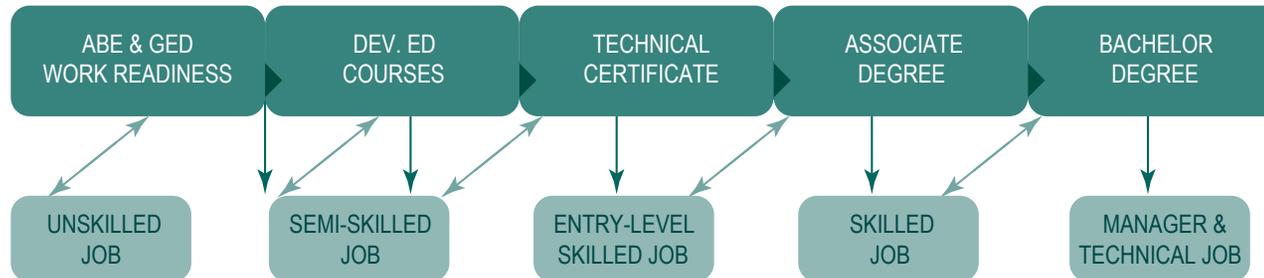
- 19 or over when entering courses;
- Financially independent;
- Working full-time;
- Responsible for dependents or;
- Attending courses part-time.

Nontraditional students often take a less direct pathway to a postsecondary degree than traditional students. The figure below compares the pathways of traditional and nontraditional students. The nontraditional student has more potential gaps in their pathway to a postsecondary degree and may alternate between work and school as they build towards a final credential.

### Traditional Student Pathway



### Nontraditional Student Pathway To A Postsecondary Degree



Source: Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE)



Working adults and parents need course schedules that allow students to balance work, school, and family. Courses offered on the weekends, evenings, and in concentrated block format help students that work or care for children during the day. Additionally, low-income adults need resources to cover non-academic costs associated with attending class, such as childcare and transportation.

Academic supports like help with course registration, course planning, and career planning all assist students that are unfamiliar or new to taking courses on a college campus.

Working students that enroll less than part-time or in short-term training frequently cannot benefit from grants or low-interest loans because they do not attend class half-time. Financial aid is needed for those students that take a limited number of courses, so they can stack courses over time to a final degree or certificate.

### Best Practices in ABE/GED in Mississippi:

At East Mississippi Community College (EMCC), students in ABE courses come for 4-hour classes Monday through Thursday. Students are assessed each Friday to provide instructors with an individual diagnostic profile and a grade-level equivalency for the student. Student scores help instructors to gauge student progress and determine if they are ready to advance into GED preparation courses. Once ABE students have the skills to enter GED courses, they take intensive, one-week courses that prepare students for 1 of the 5 GED subject tests- math, language, writing, science, and social studies. Students proceed through all subjects to earn their GED.<sup>14</sup>

Outside of ABE instruction, adults can also come to the ABE office to seek advice or pick up materials to prepare for the GED on their own time. At EMCC, adults can also receive assistance in preparing for the ACT or WorkKeys tests.

Like many ABE programs, budget cuts have decreased state support for the broad range of services EMCC provides to students. However, EMCC continues to find innovative ways to support their students. EMCC uses a portion of their Dropout Recovery Funds to provide students with travel vouchers and scholarships for GED testing fees, key supports that help students cover the cost of driving to class each day and testing.

Supports like travel vouchers can make a large difference for those low-income adults struggling to make ends meet as they attend classes. Mississippi should take steps to ensure that more ABE/GED programs across the state use resources to provide student supports like travel vouchers, child care, and counseling services, so students can balance other responsibilities as they attend classes.

**BUILDING RESPONSIVE WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS: REGIONAL SECTOR INITIATIVES**

Without postsecondary credentials, Mississippi’s adults face a job market with shrinking opportunities for quality, family supporting jobs. Without prepared employees, Mississippi’s economy is at risk of losing employers that create quality jobs for its citizens.

The need to advance more working adults towards postsecondary credentials and degrees is not only important for low-skill adults, it is also important for the overall prosperity of the state’s industries and economy.

Understanding the challenge Mississippi faces is the first step towards implementing reforms that support more adults in their path to increase skills and move to post-secondary completion. However, questions also emerge:

- What groups are critical to moving more adults towards postsecondary credentials?
- What groups must collaborate to ensure the vitality of Mississippi’s regional industries today?
- How can these groups collaborate to move the state’s economy forward?

Workforce agencies, workers, employers, educators, political leaders, and economic developers are all somehow invested in workforce development and the state’s economic vitality. To bring these groups together to support regional industries requires great planning and commitment from all parties.

One framework-sector initiatives-creates policies and partnerships to support all these groups with the goal of streamlining education and workforce development efforts to meet an industry’s need for skilled labor.<sup>15</sup>

Sector initiatives use labor market data to identify industry sectors in a region that provide quality jobs and have a significant demand for workers and training. In other states selected sectors cover a broad range of industries- healthcare, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, maritime transportation, construction, forest products, etc. Regions typically will focus resources on a few industries that exhibit growth opportunities.

Once a sector is selected, workforce agencies, educators, employers, and local leaders collaborate to align the workforce needs of employers and the employment needs of workers. The end result is a better understanding of workplace needs and a training/education infrastructure that adapts quickly to train and advance low-skill workers into quality, family supporting jobs.



**Career Pathways: Building seamless pathways to postsecondary credentials**

Career pathways are a key component of any regional sector initiative. Career pathways are “a series of connected education and training programs with support services that enable adults to get jobs in specific industries. Adults advance over time to higher levels of education and work in their industry. Each step on the pathway is designed to prepare the adult for the next level of work and education. Career pathways serve to strengthen the systems that keep a workforce competitive.”<sup>16</sup>

Career pathways provide clear course maps for educational advancement for adults of every starting skill level- from ABE to high school graduates to currently employed workers. The framework is described as:

“A commuter transit system that is run on the schedule of working adults and that can accommodate lots of on-and-off traffic, but still makes connections to long-term destinations...Such a system would provide a clear map of the educational pathways that adult students can follow to advance in their jobs and pursue further education, indicating where they can ‘stop out’ of education for a

time and reenter as their circumstance and resources permit.”<sup>17</sup>

The box below provides the key components of a career pathways framework. Continued charting of career pathways in Mississippi will mean working across areas that may operate relatively independently of one another – adult basic education, workforce education, professional/technical education and academic transfer departments- so students can advance to college-level coursework and ultimately secure employment in family-supporting jobs.<sup>18</sup>

**Core components of career pathways:**

1. Multiple entry points for adult education, workforce training, and not simply through high school.
2. Innovations in program content and delivery such as flexible scheduling, contextualization, integration of bridge courses.
3. Sequence of education and training leading to credentials with value in the labor market.
4. Support services provided by community organizations, community colleges, and other organizations.
5. Strong role for employers in pathway development, worksite training, and contribution of resources.

Source: Center for Law and Social Policy

For career pathways to have the greatest benefit for employers and working-age adults, employers must be a valued and active part of pathway development and continuation. Employers play an important part in determining and updating relevant skills and competencies during course development. If employers know students are gaining the skills they need, they are more likely to legitimize career pathways and support adults that are transitioning out of pathways and into employment.<sup>19</sup> With the help of employers, career pathways can also be designed to meet the needs of incumbent workers- both in curriculum and in scheduling. Employer involvement is essential to equipping workers with skills that are in-demand and degrees that will provide better job opportunities as adults exit their pathway.

Support services are a critical piece of career pathways and increase the likelihood of success for low-skill, low-income adults. Career pathway initiatives in Arkansas, Kentucky, Oregon, and Washington all provide support services specifically catered to low-skill adults.<sup>20</sup> Frequently, the framework includes hiring an advisor to work at each community college that is directly responsible for guiding adults in career pathways. The counselors act as a mentor and guide students through class selection, financial aid applications, transportation & childcare assistance, and are well connected to outside community organizations that provide support beyond what the community colleges traditionally provide.

The table below provides examples of support services that target the needs of low-skill adults that return to community colleges for additional education.

### Support services help students manage work and school

School	Family	Employment
Career Pathways Counselor	Childcare	Career Planning
Financial Aid Assistance	Transportation	Internships
Academic Advising	Referrals to Outside Organizations	Workforce Readiness
Time Management Courses		Job Placement
Note-taking and Test-taking		

The career pathways framework seeks to increase persistence towards a degree for all students, not just those that are college-ready. Career pathway bridges are courses designed to ‘bridge’ the gap between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED programs and college-level courses. Bridge courses integrate ABE or developmental education courses with an occupational curriculum, so students can apply basic skills education to their future career pathway. Many career pathway bridges also offer a certificate for completing students. These certificates incentivize students to continue into college-level courses and provide them with a sense of progress and a credential. The ‘Bridges to Success’ box provides more detailed information on bridge courses.



### BRIDGES TO SUCCESS: Blending developmental and basic skills courses with occupational content

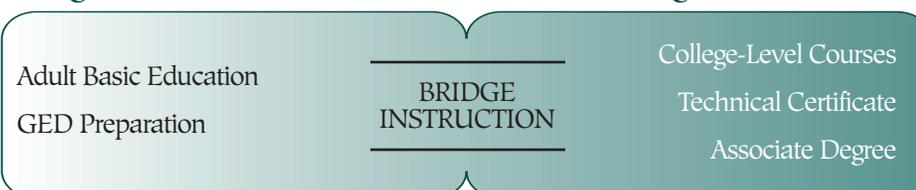
Career Pathway Bridge instruction combines remedial or basic skills content with postsecondary occupational content to help lower-skilled, nontraditional students overcome the skills gap that can prevent underprepared or nontraditional students from entering and succeeding in college-level courses.<sup>21</sup>

Community colleges develop bridges through joint planning between remedial & occupational instructors and practitioners in the field. Bridges may also provide students with course credit that can be applied to college-level course requirements in their career pathway. Career pathway bridges require close partnerships among education and training sectors and adaptive faculty during curriculum development, but can be critical in helping students relate remedial content to a future degree and career.

Example of a career pathway bridge: Southeast Arkansas College provides a one semester, block ‘bridge’ curriculum for 15 students referred to developmental education that are interested in healthcare careers. In the bridge, remedial math and reading courses are contextualized to the allied health field. Area hospitals provided input during curriculum development and sent staff to participate in course instruction. Class examples focus on real life scenarios, so students are better able to connect remedial coursework to a future career. Through this bridge, students fulfill remediation requirements while also becoming better prepared to transition into for-credit, allied health courses. During its first 3 years, 14 out of 15 students in the bridge courses successfully transitioned to allied health courses counting towards their degree.<sup>22</sup>

Career pathways assist low-skill adults in transitions from courses that support college-readiness like ABE, GED preparation and developmental education into college-level courses that count towards a degree or credential. However it is important to note that the framework’s components- multiple entry and exit points, sequenced courses leading to credentials, support services for students, innovative course content, and employer involvement- also help increase persistence for high school students that are beginning college-level courses, for someone out of work who needs to learn new skills, and for incumbent workers looking to boost skills and meet employer demands. Whether entering college for the first time or returning, career pathways can build a better prepared workforce in Mississippi and support adults in not only accessing education, but in persisting towards a degree.

### Bridge Courses Connect ABE/GED with College-Level Courses



Source: Regional Industry Skills Education

### Opportunities for funding of career pathways and career pathways bridge courses

As the number of states implementing statewide career pathways grows, so do models for channeling federal funding to support implementation. Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin have all leveraged some portion of career pathways funding from outside the state. A number of federal resources exist to support key components of career pathway development, implementation, and continuation. A recent report by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) details ten potential federal funding sources including- WIA Title I, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Wagner Peyser Act, WIA Title II, Pell Grants, Perkins Career and Technical Education, TANF, and SNAP Employment and Training.<sup>23</sup>

The table below details uses of four of the funding sources included in CLASP's report. Regardless of the source, leveraging funding for career pathways may entail multiple state agencies- the State Board of Community and Junior Colleges, Institutions of Higher Learning, Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Department of Health and Human Services- working together to receive, allocate, and track funds.

### Federal Funding Options To Support Career Pathways

Federal resource	Supported components of career pathways
Workforce Investment Act Title I: Adult and Dislocated Worker	Supports initiatives that help employers find the skilled workers they need. Funding can be used for industry engagement, case management, tuition, and support services. Discretionary funds can be used to seed career pathway bridges, and training funds can be used for training associated with career pathways.
Workforce Investment Act Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy	State leadership funds (12.5 percent of total) can be used to develop bridge courses, create new service models, provide professional development, and integrate literacy instruction with occupational skill training. Must be used to provide adult education and literacy services below post-secondary level.
Pell Grants	Supports low-income students enrolled in postsecondary programs at least 1 year long resulting in a certificate or degree. Pell grants can be used for tuition, fees, housing, books, transportation, and/or childcare based on the student's needs. During pathway design, care needs to be taken to make career pathways components Pell-eligible based on program length and intensity.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	Supports educational pursuit of low-income adults with children. Funds can be used for curricula development, costs of education and training, counselors, and supportive services. Funds are not limited to recipients of TANF cash assistance. States can set income criteria for eligible participants. For TANF recipients, vocational education can only count towards the state's federal participation rate for 12 months which serves as a barrier to TANF recipients needing courses beyond 1 year.

Source: Funding Career Pathways and Career Pathway Bridges. 2010.CLASP.

## Chapter 4

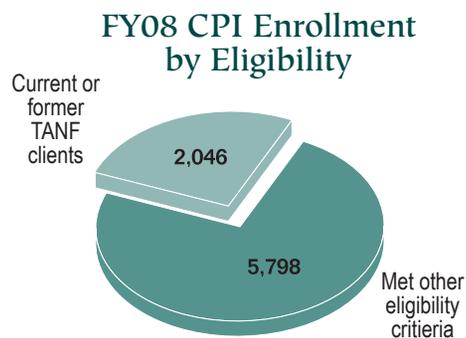
### STATE AND REGIONAL MODELS OF CAREER PATHWAYS AND SECTOR INITIATIVES

The following pages provide three profiles of career pathways and sector initiatives. All of these models were developed with the goal of connecting low-skill adults to degrees and credentials while also meeting the evolving skill needs of the area's employers. The models provided are:

- Arkansas: Career Pathways Initiative;
- Mississippi: Corridor Consortium;
- Oregon: Career Pathways Initiative.

#### ARKANSAS CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVE (CPI):

Launched in 2005, Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) connects education, training and support services to help low-income students gain educational credentials, obtain employment and, most importantly, progress through higher levels of education and employment in a specific field.<sup>24</sup> The CPI framework formally connects educational stepping stones offered at Arkansas community colleges including- Adult Education/GED, Career Readiness Certificates, WAGE Certificates, bridge programs, technical certificates, and associate degree programs. Pathways focus on a specific high demand field such as nursing or transportation and create a formal map of coursework for students to attain quality jobs in that field.



Source: Workforce Strategy Center

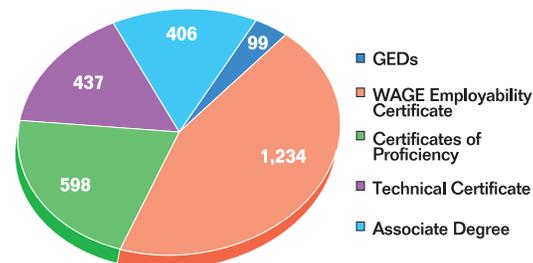
**CPI Eligibility:** Current or former TANF recipients, current recipients of Food Stamps, CHIP, Medicaid, or parents earning less than 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Career pathways are designed with many entry and exit points, so students can attain a credential, seek employment, and then come back and re-enroll to gain additional credentials. To overcome traditional gaps in the road to a post-secondary degree, students take bridge courses to increase preparedness for for-credit courses.<sup>25</sup>

#### Ensuring success for low-income adults

The CPI has developed targeted courses to help ensure low-skill, low-income adults successfully attain a certificate or degree. Various bridge programs have been designed to serve students who need basic academic skills remediation before entering college-level programs. Various non-credit certificates are available along the way to help students who desire more immediate employment. After completing one of the non-credit certificates, students can continue through a Career Pathway at their own pace, earning a for-credit Certificate of Proficiency, a one-year Certificate, and eventually an Associate Degree.<sup>26</sup>

#### Certificates And Degrees Awarded In Arkansas Career Pathways, 2008



Source: Workforce Strategy Center

#### Responding to Employer Needs

A curriculum coordinator continually reviews local labor market data and meets with employers to make sure pathways respond to local demands. For example, based on local demand Phillips Community College has developed career pathways in 5 fields; Information Support Services, Family and Community Services, Teaching and Training, Therapeutic Services, and Health Information.<sup>27</sup>

#### Funding

The Department of Welfare Services uses a TANF grant to fund the CPI. Each year between \$250,000 and \$700,000 is provided to each participating community college. The funding establishes a career pathways office at the community college with a CPI Director, curriculum coordinator, student advisor, and preemployment counselor. Funding also provides support services essential to low-income students like books, tutoring, job search training, individual career planning, and childcare and transportation vouchers. The Director works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Workforce Services, and Workforce Investment Board to identify, enroll, and serve TANF clients.

## MISSISSIPPI CORRIDOR CONSORTIUM

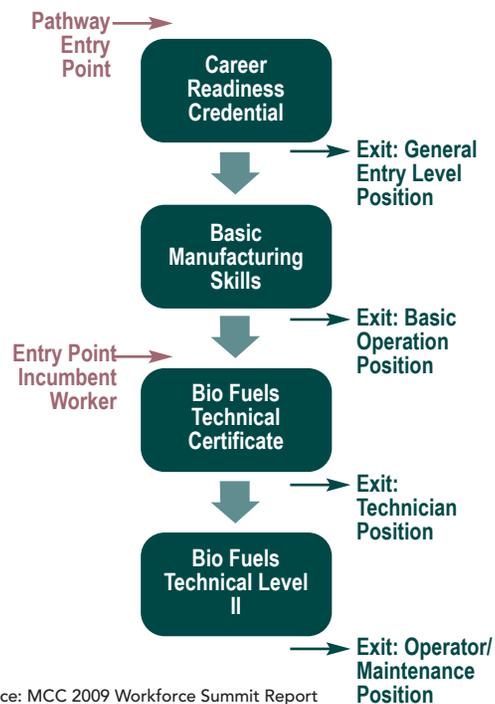
In North Mississippi, the Mississippi Corridor Consortium (MCC) combines the strengths of 4 community colleges\* to support employer training needs. In 2004, the four colleges came together with the goal of increasing economic competitiveness for the 27-county region they serve.<sup>28, 29</sup> To meet this goal, community colleges target training to both out-of-work and incumbent workers through different initiatives.

### Increasing credentials and skills among North Mississippi's workforce

MCC's training model uses many key features of sector strategies and career pathways: multiple entry and exit points, basic skills remediation, transferable credits and certifications, and stackable credentials that lead to a degree.<sup>30</sup>

The MCC leadership recognizes that increasing the number of employees with credentials in their workforce is valuable to current and future companies in the region. The Consortium works to transition individuals toward certifications in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, information technology, health care and computer operations.<sup>31</sup>

### EXAMPLE OF MCC CAREER PATHWAY



Source: MCC 2009 Workforce Summit Report

### Training centers meet dynamic employer needs

A network of communication between workforce agencies, employers, and community colleges enables the MCC to develop facilities that provide targeted training and courses that build skills for thousands of workers across the region. Below are some key examples of how the MCC has leveraged resources to meet employer training needs.

- The Manufacturing Solution Center, located in Tupelo, works with employers and workers in the region to build the workforce's advanced manufacturing skills in automated manufacturing, supervisory management, automatic identification system and welding.<sup>32</sup>

- The Existing Industry Training Program helps existing industries provide high-impact training for current employees in MCC's region. Course offerings are geared towards high cost training that provides immediate skill enhancement for students and a fast return on investment for employers.<sup>33</sup>
- Navigating Employment Opportunities in Nursing (NEON) helps bridge the gap between demand and supply in the allied health workforce. NEON develops career pathways in health care, so students can transition over time from a GED to a nurse practitioner.<sup>34</sup>
- A mobile welding laboratory travels to communities in the region to meet local training needs. The mobile lab is furnished with welding booths and provides training in mig, tig, and stick welding.

### The MCC raises workforce skills and earnings

The National Strategic Planning and Resource Center (nSPARC) at Mississippi State University conducted an analysis of the MCC's NEON Initiative.<sup>35</sup> In 2008 alone, 32,950 individuals received training through the initiative. Of those, 79% of the unemployed participants found employment after their training. The average annual wage for the training participants was \$32,889. The median wage gain after training was \$4,313 per year per individual.<sup>36</sup>

Also in 2008, The Mississippi Partnership WIA, through the MCC, was able to provide Incumbent Worker Training that assisted 100 employers by training over 600 employees in areas such as lean manufacturing, welding, industrial hydraulics/pneumatics, and industrial electricity.<sup>37</sup>

## Consortium receives funding from a broad range of sources

Broad based support for the Mississippi Corridor Consortium is reflected in the variety of sources that have supported its training facilities and courses. The Consortium's NEON health care initiative is supported through \$1.9 million from the Department of Labor. The State Board of Community and Junior Colleges and the State Workforce Investment Board contributed \$1.2 million to the Manufacturing Solution Center. All costs associated with the Existing Industry Training Program classes are covered through federal incumbent worker training funds from WIA, Manufacturing Extension Partnership funds, and Workforce Enhancement Training funds through the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges.<sup>38</sup> Three Rivers Planning and Development District and the Appalachian Regional Commission both provided \$100,000 for the mobile welding lab, and the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges covers the labs instructional costs.<sup>39</sup>

## OREGON CAREER PATHWAYS

Career pathways were first designed to meet local employer needs at 3 Oregon community colleges. The success of the pathways eventually led Oregon to invest in a statewide Career Pathways Initiative in all 17 of the state's community colleges.<sup>40</sup> Oregon's community colleges partner with the High School Technical Education Network, Departments of Education, Employment, Human Services, and workforce investment boards to advance pathways. A Statewide Pathways Director oversees integration of the framework.

The goals of the statewide initiative are: 1) to increase the number of Oregonians with certificates, credentials and degrees and 2) to articulate and ease student transitions across the education continuum from high school to community college; from pre-college (ABE/GED/ESL) to postsecondary; and from community college to university or employment. Pathways target the high-demand industries of healthcare, manufacturing, and management.

### Innovative Curricula and Services In Oregon

- Online Career Pathways Roadmap Webtool illustrates over 200 pathways, their entry and exit points, and job openings in a particular pathway.
- Career and College Awareness Course prepare ABE/GED students to enter for-credit courses.
- Adult Basic Skills Bridge Courses prepare basic education students to transition to postsecondary courses. The courses contextualize basic education for healthcare and manufacturing industries.
- Career Pathways Certificates provide students with an employer-recognized credential and incentivize students to continue in their pathway towards a degree or certificate. Over different 100 Career Pathways Certificates exist today (see example below).

### Integrating career pathways at community colleges

Working across silos that existed in community colleges to integrate the career pathways framework presented a challenge. Often programs operated under separate institutional missions and were not collaborating regularly. To help colleges integrate pathways and bridge institutional barriers, two statewide 'pathway academies' were held in 2005

and 2007. Peer support and learning exchanges were vital parts of technical assistance provided at each academy.

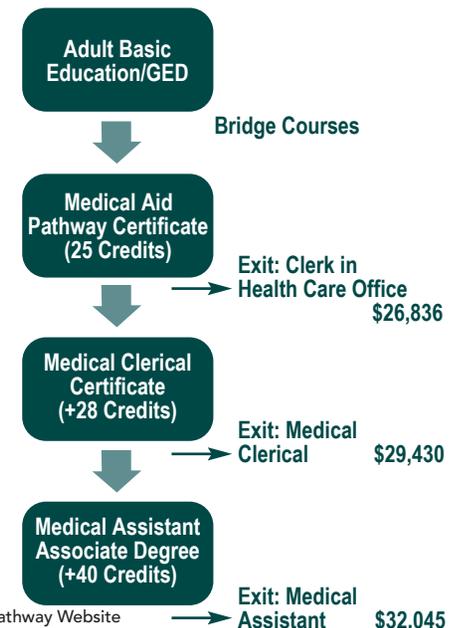
### Responding to employer needs

Oregon pathways are designed to adapt to needs of students and employers. Local-level employer advisory committees work to develop pathways and ensure certificates meet local employer needs. Employers also emphasized the value of short-term certificates in addition to 2 and 4-year degrees.<sup>41</sup> The initiative works with One-Stop Career Centers to help students with job placement and skill assessment.

### Funding

Funding for the first pilot came from local workforce investment boards and the League of Innovation.<sup>42</sup> The statewide initiative utilized \$6.2 million in federal and state funds from 2004 to 2009. Seventy-five percent of funding came from a Workforce Investment Act Incentive Grant and 25 percent came from the community college's general fund.<sup>43</sup> Grants to colleges support program development, student services, and curriculum development.

### Oregon's Online Road Map Tool: Health And Medical Aid



Source: Oregon Career Pathway Website

## CONCLUSIONS

Thousands of adults across the state stand to benefit from persisting to a postsecondary certificate or degree. Our state's community colleges and workforce training network are two of the state's greatest assets. However, to meet the dynamic demands of today's employers and raise the economic security of low-skill adults, Mississippi has opportunities to strengthen how these systems support low-skill adults and nontraditional students on a pathway towards a postsecondary certificate or degree.

The recent economic recession has resulted in significantly increased enrollment across the state's postsecondary institutions. Some of these students are recent high school graduates while others are working adults in need of new skills and careers. The increased enrollment also means that now, more than ever, it is important that colleges have resources and programs and policies in place that ensure persistence and that support students on the road to a postsecondary credential.

Mississippi's prosperity depends on increasing postsecondary persistence and completion among working adults and aligning workforce training with quality, in-demand careers. The Career Pathways and Sector Initiatives described in this report provide an avenue to enhance the state's efforts to connect more low-skill adults, recent high school graduates, and working adults with valuable postsecondary credentials and occupational skills.

A single entity cannot support the need for increased education and skills across our state. Meeting employer skill demands and advancing low-skill adults into quality careers will take the commitment and willingness of leaders in workforce development, higher education, industry, secondary education, government, nonprofits, and human services. Mississippi needs their combined efforts to provide adults with the education, career opportunities, and economic security that will ensure prosperity for the state's residents now and in the future.

## MISSISSIPPI ECONOMIC POLICY CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy and programmatic actions can expand Mississippi's efforts to promote post-secondary persistence and completion and prepare a qualified workforce.

- 1) Continue to support student persistence towards a post-secondary credential by exploring funding opportunities and encouraging implementation of Career Pathways that provide wrap-around support services and clear roadmaps to a postsecondary degree for all students from those in ABE and GED to nontraditional students and recent high school graduates.
- 2) Use the state's quality data systems to strengthen the performance of strategies to improve postsecondary transitions and completion based on the reviewed outcomes.
- 3) Encourage the development of career pathways bridge courses, so that students in basic education and developmental education are exposed to real world, occupational curriculum and can connect coursework with a Career Pathway and future career aspirations.
- 4) Build on Mississippi's momentum for developing regional sector initiatives like the Corridor Consortium by creating opportunities for other consortia to implant workforce training strategies that address the skill needs of local employers.

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