



Why a leading tech company invested in YouScience for Alabama students

Alabama students in grades 7-12 in Jackson County and Scottsboro City can now take advantage of three years of YouScience® Aptitude & Career Discovery, thanks to efforts from an area chamber of commerce and a grant from a local Google data center.

Organizations at a glance:

- **Jackson County School District**
Scottsboro, Alabama
 - 5,158 students
 - 18 schools
- **Scottsboro City Schools**
Scottsboro, Alabama
 - 2,442 students
 - 6 schools

Building a talent pipeline to area businesses and industries

Local community leaders throughout the state of Alabama are constantly looking for ways to attract investments from the manufacturing and technology industries, while supporting businesses from industries already established in their communities. The key to doing so is supplying a large, highly diverse, and trained workforce these employers demand.



The Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce promotes business interests in Jackson County, located in the state's northeast corner. Chamber leadership and administrators from Jackson County Schools and Scottsboro City Schools looked for ways to close the gap between education and businesses' need for quality workers. That meant looking more closely at schools' career and technical education (CTE) programs and other community resources to better train students to fill in-demand positions with area employers.

The chamber and school districts' efforts encountered a few challenges upfront. Historically, what's been known as "career tech" programs have had a stigma attached—that CTE was no more than "vo-tech" or "shop class"—not only in the minds of Alabama students but with students all across the country. Even though CTE programs today are much different, with more advanced career options and training, this stigma often makes it hard to attract students to sign up. Additionally, many students, regardless of location, think the only way to gain the skills they need for their careers is to complete a college degree.

"We're trying to bridge a stigma of the past with what was then thought of as career tech with today's modern sense of advanced careers and career fields with the same students," said Jason Davidson, superintendent, Jackson County School District.

“They really don’t know what skills they have and what jobs would be available. And until you provide them with some type of tool early in their academic career, they don’t know what potential is out there for them.”

A nearby county’s chamber of commerce had sponsored YouScience Aptitude & Career Discovery for its area schools. Nancy Griggs, the Director of Talent Development/Workforce Resource Network Coordinator and the Workforce Solutions Initiative for the Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce, noticed their success and wanted to replicate it for schools in Jackson County School and Scottsboro City School Districts.

Griggs introduced YouScience to the educational leadership in the county, and while they were very interested in implementing YouScience, they didn’t have the funding. So, she coordinated a meeting between YouScience and businesses in the area to see if they would be interested in sponsoring the program.

Milea Hanner, a territory manager at YouScience, was asked to present to chamber members, plus its education and industry partners, about the solution’s many benefits. She shared an example of talent-pipeline reporting during the presentation that showed students have an aptitude for advanced manufacturing, but not interest. As a result, the chamber’s industry partners were now sold on using YouScience to help students discover their aptitudes and natural abilities, get the training they need, and pursue career and employment opportunities in their communities. “All educators, businesses, and industry were very impressed with YouScience due to the fact that this program offered a lot for our students in career planning, would benefit 1,169 7th-12th grade students, and would interface with business and industry,” said Griggs. A local Google data center that had trouble in the past attracting skilled workers to fill its open positions was so impressed by the presentation that it offered a \$57 thousand grant to fund three years of YouScience for all students in Jackson County Schools and Scottsboro City Schools in grades 7-12.

Looking toward the future

Using YouScience in their CTE programs helps Jackson County and Scottsboro City schools get students started earlier in thinking about and planning for their futures. YouScience assessments help students figure out what they’re good at and enable them to build a career pathway that takes advantage of their talents and aptitudes.

“YouScience is something that will help our kids in the sixth and seventh grades to identify the areas where they have skills, talents, and interests, so we can deepen those as we go forward,” said Jason Hass, CTE/Secondary Curriculum Director, Scottsboro City Schools.

“Rather than having kids choosing many different programs and paths all the way through high school and just getting surface-level skills, we really want to produce students who have fully developed their talents and skills by the time they’re seniors moving into the workforce or college. When they go to our businesses, industries, universities, and community colleges, we want them to have value.”

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— Jason Hass, CTE/Secondary Curriculum Director,
Scottsboro City Schools

Opening up new possibilities for students

With YouScience in place, Jackson County and Scottsboro schools are better able to align students and resources together to maximize their potential. Plus, students now have more than one pathway forward to develop their skills and land a rewarding career.

“We want to build into our school system the idea that you can take a pathway through a career tech program based on the skillset you have, and that could lead you to careers through college, the military, or any other career path you choose,” Davidson stated. “You can go through a pathway and obtain the skills, knowledge, and certifications available, and that could lead to an advanced career faster than just going through a four-year university program.”



“When we look at opportunities for students, we want them to be able to take programs that we offer in our school system, whether it’s through the career tech umbrella, through a fine arts program, or through an academic class. If we’re not offering those, we need to start aligning resources now to line up for those jobs and for those interests that those students have.”

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Inspiring worker commitment

Jackson County employers want highly trained, highly skilled employees who show initiative. YouScience helps area schools identify students with the right aptitudes to succeed in these positions, placing them on a pathway to develop the necessary skills to fill them.

“Business and industry partners are more than happy to work with us because they saw the opportunity that if we can identify what our kids are interested and talented in, then give them training and path to go on, we’re giving them an end product of someone who wants to work at their place of business and is going to have the interest and talents to stay.” Hass noted. “That’s what [our partners] are wanting, and I think they see the benefit of YouScience as helping to shape and push students into the direction where they will have a long-term commitment.”

“Our students are our greatest resource to fill the talent pipeline of potential workers for business and industry in Jackson County. YouScience will be a game-changer in recruiting our students to in-demand careers.”

—Nancy Griggs, Director of Talent Development/
Workforce Resource Network Coordinator and the
Workforce Solutions Initiative for the Mountain Lakes
Chamber of Commerce

INSIGHTS

Complementary solutions to drive CTE skills and learning

Superintendent Davidson hopes to turn what he's done for Jackson County schools into a model for all of the state of Alabama. He plans to take his findings and results from using YouScience in the district's schools to the state director of education and prove how YouScience can help schools in the rest of the state. Also, the data YouScience provides helps administrators decide which CTE courses and programs to offer and the clusters underneath to continue helping students succeed.

Challenges

- Supplying area businesses and industries with a highly trained, highly skilled workforce.
- Overcoming the stigma of career tech education and creating different paths to a rewarding career.
- Starting earlier with students to help them discover their aptitudes and pathways.
- Creating a workforce with the skills to fill in-demand jobs who also show initiative and commitment.

Solutions

- YouScience Aptitude & Career Discovery.

Results

- YouScience assessments available to all students in Jackson County Schools and Scottsboro City Schools in grades 7-12.
- Early identification of aptitudes and skills help students better prepare for their futures.
- Strengthening partnerships between community leaders, schools, and business and industry partners.
- Increasing involvement in schools' CTE programs.



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sales@youscience.com.