



Improving career education and workforce development

With the help of a state grant, Jackson County, Mississippi, is able to embed career coaches in local high schools and use YouScience® Aptitude & Career Discovery to support workforce development.



Collaborating to solve a community need

Jackson County is one of Mississippi's most industrialized counties. Its many businesses include the state's largest industrial employer, Ingalls Shipbuilding, and manufacturing facilities for Rolls-Royce's naval parts, Northrop Grumman Corporation's unmanned aerospace systems, and Chevron's largest oil refinery.

These types of businesses and industries make it challenging for employers to find, attract, train for, and fill area jobs.

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The chamber has an Education and Workforce Development Committee development committee dedicated to education at all levels and workforce development tightly connected to Jackson County's business community, including both large industries and small businesses. The mission of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation, Inc. (JCEDF) includes workforce development, recruiting, and helping industries grow. The two organizations pooled their efforts to create an initiative to promote workforce development and career education in area schools, called the P3: Passion. Purpose. Paycheck.

As part of the P3 Initiative, seven career coaches are embedded in area high schools to help guide students along their career exploration journey. The coaches use Aptitude & Career Discovery to complement their efforts to help students discover their aptitudes for potential in-demand area careers.

Challenges

- Bridging the gap between educators and employers
- Fostering workforce development and career technical education in area schools
- Building a workforce able to meet the needs of area employers
- Helping students discover their aptitudes and chart a career path

Solution

- **Aptitude & Career Discovery**

Results

- More focus on workforce development and career education
- Seven embedded career coaches in area schools to help students understand and apply Aptitude & Career Discovery results
- Pools of candidates to fill traditional and highly skilled jobs with area companies and across multiple industries

Bridging the gap between education and career

The initiative's initial need was for funding to get the program up and running. An official at the JCEDF knew of a grant that used repurposed funds from the CARES Act available through the Mississippi governor's office. Getting the funds required the chamber and JCEDF to work with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission involves education. They brought aboard the United Way for Jackson and George Counties in 2020 to serve as fiscal agent for the grant and become the third partner in the P3 Initiative.

Coaches were placed in schools at the beginning of the 2021–22 school year. They began using Aptitude & Career Discovery in early 2022.

“We’re very fortunate in Jackson County to have a group of business and industry leaders who connect with education and understand it,” said David Fava, career coach supervisor, United Way for Jackson and George Counties. “They’re not just talking about things anymore, but they’re actually doing something about them.”

Historically, area students graduated from high school without a solid plan in place to be, as Roberts dubs it, “enrolled, enlisted, or employed.” To change things, career coaches were tasked with ensuring that graduates have a plan in place for their futures and to help remove barriers that might prevent graduates from achieving their plans.

Aptitude & Career Discovery helps students figure out where they’re going and what they need to do to get there.

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Matching aptitudes with career pathways

With the help of Aptitude & Career Discovery, students discover their aptitudes and the careers that best match. Career coaches help students digest their results and plot a pathway forward.

Students see a “before-and-after” snapshot of the career pathways they were interested in and learn where their aptitudes lie, which helps open new possibilities. Plus, students have something they can show their parents that validates their natural talents, while helping parents understand what’s possible for their children.

“There are so many reasons why a career coach’s presence, along with using YouScience Aptitude & Career Discovery, are critical interventions in these teenagers’ lives,” Roberts said. “We’re ensuring that graduates have a plan in place, and we’re helping remove barriers from their paths as they find their way as constructive adults.”

A local success story

In a career coaching success, one student lived in an impoverished situation with several siblings in a one-bedroom apartment. Her mother was a single parent and struggled to support her children. This student seemed to have a similar future ahead; she worked at a fast-food restaurant with few prospects for a bright future. A career coach approached her about taking a Aptitude & Career Discovery and found out what her interests were and what she might want to do for a career.

Her results showed that she was a good fit for a career in occupational therapy. She and the career coach began to explore options and found an occupational therapy program at a nearby community college. She applied, was accepted, and begins classes in the fall. With the help of Aptitude & Career Discovery and the career coach, she has a chance to break the cycle of poverty in her family.

This girl’s experience is just one example of how the program is solving a real community need. With the career coaches and Aptitude & Career Discovery, Jackson County students have a better idea of the local, in-demand career opportunities and how to take advantage of those opportunities. And area employers have a pool of natural talent to draw on.

“We’re able to say, ‘we have your workers; we have the workforce you need, and we’ve actually been building and nurturing them,’” said Roberts.



Organizations at a glance:

Jackson County Chamber of Commerce

500+

members and volunteers

Jackson County Economic Development Foundation

16

board members and staff

United Way for Jackson and George Counties

17

member agencies

7

embedded career coaches

