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# Mississippi

## Quality Coaching in Action

Through dedicated career coaches in nearly every public high school, Mississippi offers guidance about high-wage, high-demand opportunities and the education pathways that lead to them.

AccelerateMS, the workforce development agency for Mississippi, launched a statewide career coaching program in 2022. The program guides middle and high school students in exploring education and career paths, helping them to identify high-wage, high-demand jobs and connecting them with local employers.

Established through the Comprehensive Career and Technical Education Reform Act,<sup>1</sup> the program was funded initially through \$8 million in startup funds as well as \$12 million per year in state-appropriated funds. This financial support was increased further for 2026 to \$15.6 million. As a result of the initial investment and other projects, Mississippi's career coach program increased by 500 percent, from 25 coaches to approximately 150 coaches throughout the state.<sup>2</sup> The coaching program aligns with AccelerateMS's mission of "developing and deploying workforce strategies to connect individuals with transformative, high-paying careers."

➔ "My goal is to help students feel confident in their decisions about the future," says Misty Roberts, an AccelerateMS career coach for students in Mississippi's Kemper County School District.



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## Mississippi's approach

The AccelerateMS coaching program is well-aligned with the principles for quality education-to-career guidance that have been defined and endorsed by education and workforce leaders.<sup>3</sup> AccelerateMS's model provides personalized coaching to students that supports them in mapping their education-to-career pathways. The core of this guidance is information about high-wage, high-demand industries and the postsecondary training needed to pursue these opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Students and coaches explore options and pathways and create aligned education and career plans. Coaches also help students build their professional networks through job shadowing and other industry connections.

## Connection to state policy and priorities

AccelerateMS's coaching model is rooted in the state's workforce priorities. In 2018, the Mississippi Economic Council published a blueprint for the state's economic growth, highlighting more than 40,000 high-paying, unfilled positions that, if filled, would set the state on a strong future path.<sup>5</sup> The report articulated that filling these jobs would require the state to broaden its "workforce currency" to include credential and training programs as well as postsecondary degrees. A pilot program through the CREATE Foundation, funded by the Toyota Wellspring Education Fund, provided the model for AccelerateMS's approach.<sup>6</sup>



In 2022, the Comprehensive Career and Technical Education Reform Act passed unanimously in the state House and Senate and established AccelerateMS as the state coordinating entity for coaching work in high schools.<sup>7,8</sup> Mississippi has continued to invest in its core coaching strategy through subsequent legislation and funding,<sup>9</sup> and Accelerate MS continues to collect data on contacts with career coaches, participation rates in postsecondary education, and enrollment in postsecondary programs aligned with high-demand jobs. AccelerateMS now provides dedicated career coaches in nearly every public high school in the state.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Strategy

Key learnings from the state's workforce strategy released in 2018 suggested the importance of regional considerations for career planning.<sup>11</sup> AccelerateMS's coaching program is organized into eight regions to allow for tailored programs aligned with local labor market opportunities.

→ "Being a career coach, making those connections, staying in touch with those people, I can help secure some really sustainable jobs for students," says Becky Tullos, an AccelerateMS career coach at Pearl High School in Mississippi.



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## Implementation and oversight

### State-level, systemic approach with local implementation

Implementation of Mississippi's education-to-career coaching goals, through AccelerateMS, is spread across eight regions, arranged to best capture local markets and specific geographical nuances in the labor market.<sup>12</sup> Each region has a dedicated AccelerateMS project manager serving as a central point of contact for coaching activity in the region. In collaboration with a coaching manager, the project manager in each region routinely meets with stakeholders and reviews labor market data, supply chain needs, available educational and training resources, and regional/community assets.

## Regional approach

Grants are made to coordinating organizations within the regions that have responsibility for hiring and deploying coaches. Grantees include the United Way, an economic development authority, and planning and development districts.<sup>10, 11, 15, 16</sup> These fiscal and organizing agents are chosen for their knowledge of their region, their connection with and understanding of the local economy, and their demonstrated experience in managing grants. In addition, these agents collaborate via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to ensure ongoing alignment within the workforce system.

## Consistent programmatic model

While regional leaders are charged with understanding their own system, all eight regions take a cohesive approach informed by the resources and values of AccelerateMS. Shared job descriptions and affirmed practices and commitments in the grant application process position AccelerateMS to keep the coaching work congruent and aligned.<sup>12, 13, 14</sup>

## Unique positioning of coaches

Coaches are not school employees; rather, they are employed by regional organizations rooted in the communities they serve. A key advantage of this approach is that coaches do not face the many competing time demands of school counselors, enabling the coaches to focus on delivering personalized education-to-career coaching and related services.<sup>16</sup>

## Measuring success

Evaluation of AccelerateMS has begun, focused on comprehensive performance indicators. While no data are yet publicly available, these metrics include:

- The number of students entering and completing postsecondary education related to Mississippi's high-demand occupations in all eight regions of the state.
- Closing gaps between enrollment in postsecondary education in Mississippi and completing a postsecondary credential.
- Increasing the number of students with a career pathway plan by 10th and 11th grades.
- Increasing the number of students gaining a career-related work-based learning experience in 12th grade.

➔ "I'm passionate about helping students make positive changes in their lives," says Quantella Harris, an AccelerateMS career coach at Mississippi's Starkville High School.



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Additionally, AccelerateMS produces an annual report that speaks to the outcomes of the program. AccelerateMS has delivered the following measurable results:

- In 2025, nearly 200 coaches serve students in 204 high schools, reaching more than 90 percent of high schools in the state.<sup>17</sup>
- By the end of the 2023–2024 school year, the impact of coaches included:
  - Nearly 60,000 one-on-one career guidance conversations with students.
  - Approximately 6,000 students offered job-shadowing opportunities.
  - More than 3,000 guest speakers hosted.<sup>18</sup>
  - Connections with local businesses and industries as well as more than 30,000 parents and guardians.<sup>19</sup>

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Mississippi has developed several tools and resources to support its efforts:

- [Coaching role and coaching coordinator role job descriptions](#) provide guidance for coaching preparation and skill sets, as well as concepts of leadership in the coaching sector. Coaches are required to engage with employers as part of their daily activities in order to give learners current, local labor market information.
- [My Way Mississippi](#) allows for academic planning between coaches and learners. This technology complements coaching discussions on postsecondary pathways, including connections to Mississippi schools and colleges.
- [Mississippi Pathfinder](#) highlights pathways to various careers to inform both learners and coaches about specific occupations and the training options to prepare for those occupations. Pathways extend beyond colleges and universities, providing options for those looking for alternate paths to a career.

# Endnotes

- 1 Mississippi House Bill 1388. (Jackson, MS: Mississippi First, 2022). <https://www.mississippifirst.org/blog/house-bill-1388/#:~:text=Under%20HB%201388%2C%20criteria%20for,on%20a%20career%20readiness%20assessment.>
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- 8 Mississippi House Bill 1388. (Jackson, MS: Mississippi First, 2022). [https://www.mississippifirst.org/blog/house-bill-1388/.](https://www.mississippifirst.org/blog/house-bill-1388/)
- 9 Blaise King, Director of Workforce Innovation, AccelerateMS. Interview by Ruth Watkins, Strada president of postsecondary education, March 25, 2025.
- 10 "Endeavor: A Blueprint to Advance Mississippi." <https://msmec.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Endeavor-Report-12.18.pdf>, pg. 16.
- 11 Career Coaching Program. (Laurel, MS: Economic Development Authority of Jones County, 2022). [https://jonescounty.com/career-coaching-program/.](https://jonescounty.com/career-coaching-program/)
- 12 Who We Are. (Jackson, MS: AccelerateMS, 2021). [https://www.coaches.acceleratems.org/who-we-are.](https://www.coaches.acceleratems.org/who-we-are)
- 13 Scott Waller, president and CEO, Mississippi Economic Council. Interview by Melissa Leavitt, Strada vice president, quality coaching, April 11, 2025.
- 14 Waller, interview.
- 15 King, interview.
- 16 Publications. (Jackson, MS: AccelerateMS, 2021). [https://acceleratems.org/publications/.](https://acceleratems.org/publications/)
- 17 King, interview.
- 18 King, interview.
- 19 King, interview.

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