

2023



Mississippi KIDS COUNT

FACTBOOK



KIDS COUNT • INTRODUCTION

The Children's Foundation of Mississippi (CFM) is pleased to present the 2023 Mississippi KIDS COUNT Factbook. The CFM believes that for Mississippi to reach its potential, Mississippi's children and youth must reach their potential.

Nationally, and at the individual state level, KIDS COUNT has continued to be recognized as a premiere data source on children, youth, and families for more than three decades. In the recent Mississippi Senate Special Study Committee on Women, Children, and Families, several presenters cited Mississippi KIDS COUNT data and other research findings of the CFM. We are delighted to be a recognized source of information for Mississippi. KIDS COUNT can be used to gauge important changes in metrics for children, families, and communities.

Nationally, KIDS COUNT data is presented across the following four domains, with four indicators under each domain for a total of 16 indicators.

Education

- Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school
- Fourth graders not proficient in reading
- Eighth graders not proficient in math
- High school students not graduating on time

Health

- Babies with low birth weight
- Children without health insurance
- Child and teen deaths per 100,000
- Children and teens (ages 10-17) who are overweight or obese

Economic Well-Being

- Children in poverty
- Children whose parents lack secure employment
- Children living in households with a high housing cost burden
- Teens not in school and not working

Family and Community

- Children in single-parent families
- Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma
- Children living in high-poverty areas
- Teen births per 1,000

Even though Mississippi ranks 48th overall in the state-by-state comparisons, Mississippi has improved on 14 of the 16 indicators (August 2022). Each of the 16 indicators serves as an important gauge by which Mississippi's counties and the state as a whole can track changes. Compared to other states, the two indicators that have not improved include child and teen death rates and percentage of young children not in school. Please see page 6 on how Mississippi ranks with other states across the Southeast.

For most of the indicators, it would only take a modest change to be closer to the southeastern average. The policy recommendations in the KIDS COUNT Factbook and the CFM's Blueprints (I and II), can help "turn the curve" for better outcomes on behalf of Mississippi's children, families, and communities.

Mounting research demonstrates that experiences during the earliest years of a child's life are strong predictors of their future growth and development. It is also important to recognize that each child is part of a larger system. When children experience trauma, their health, cognitive development, and interpersonal relationships later in life suffer. In this factbook, we take a more in-depth look at some factors that demonstrate the importance of family and communities in children's lives. We know from the CFM's Risk and Reach report that there are great disparities among communities regarding resources and needs.

We encourage readers to visit the KIDS COUNT Data Center for more detailed information that can be used to tailor data reports among and across various geographical locations within Mississippi and across regions by age, race, and other demographics. If you or your organization would like a tutorial on using the Data Center, please contact the CFM at info@childrensfoundationms.org.

One of the state agencies charged with protecting children and youth most in need is the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS). However, it is important that each of us as individuals, communities, state agencies, nonprofits, and business leaders know that it truly takes all of us, pulling together to make positive differences in the lives of children and youth.

We are pleased to have Commissioner Andrea Sanders provide the foreword for the Factbook. Under Commissioner Sanders' leadership, the state of Mississippi is making steady progress in building a foundation of positive change, advancing evidence-based services, and increasing professional development. Her 'north star' is preventing children from entering the child welfare system. Commissioner Sanders works toward improving outcomes while underscoring the importance of giving voice to the lived expertise of youth and families in care.

Thank you for making time to review this Databook. We encourage your feedback on this publication and the work of the Children's Foundation of Mississippi by emailing us at info@childrensfoundationms.org



Linda H. Southward, Ph.D
Executive Director,
The Children's Foundation of Mississippi






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Foreword by Andrea Sanders, MSW, JD

Commissioner,
Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

When the Annie E. Casey Foundation began publishing the "KIDS COUNT Data Book" over 30 years ago, I was a young graduate student at the Tulane School of Social Work. My head was full of lofty ideas about making a difference in the world, or at least my home State of Mississippi, one child at a time.

After graduation, I returned to Jackson and scored what I thought was my dream job. I was the child therapist for an inpatient psychiatric treatment unit. The kids were admitted for an average of 3-4 weeks, but many, particularly those in state custody, stayed as much as a year at a time.

I learned a lot that year. I learned that kids are hilarious and resilient, that they adapt quickly, and that behavior in young children can be heavily influenced by the environment in which they live. In fact, with very little exception, behavior improved drastically within a short period in a milieu of other kids where behavior modification techniques were applied consistently. Once the child improved, we discharged them back home. However, it was not unusual for the same child to return for readmission within weeks, especially if nothing had changed in the family environment. I found that cycle frustrating, and the futility of it propelled me to another job within a year.

In the years since that first job, I have worked in five different state agencies and hospitals, private hospitals, obtained a law degree, and worked in Circuit Court, Drug Court, and private law practice. In each of these positions, I intervened with families in some way, and I quickly learned that I did not have the patience to improve Mississippi one child at a time. To create lasting change, I needed to focus on coordinating and strengthening the systems that strengthen families.

Last year, retired State Economist Dr. Darrin Webb wrote the Foreword for the "Mississippi Risk and

Reach Report." He suggested that the best strategy for moving Mississippi forward is to invest in the future generation of the workforce, or simply put, children. He called the task "daunting" and referred to it as a "long slog with very few encouraging signs of progress along the way." One that "does not lend itself to photo-ops, ribbon cuttings or large banners saying mission accomplished." And my favorite quote is, "it is a messy business that requires a steady, persistent, long-term commitment."

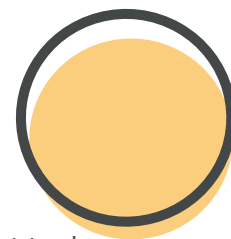
Dr. Webb's message resonated with me as I find myself completing my second year as the Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. Immersed in the "long slog," trying to navigate politics, agency history, and multiple disconnected state and federal systems on behalf of the most vulnerable children in the State, is indeed, "messy business."

It is a slog through dense, sticky mud with hidden sinkholes. The messiness of the work simply wears people out.

Traditionally, each agency or system that impacts children has approached their work and goals individually. We have attempted to remedy this isolation over the years with multi-disciplinary committees and councils tasked with collaborating. Additionally, almost all state plans for federally funded grant programs require demonstrated collaboration with other federal funding recipients.

Currently, in Mississippi, I hear a lot of interest in cross-agency collaboration. I have enjoyed good supportive relationships and communication with colleagues at other agencies.





And our work depends on partners. MDCPS meets each child's needs by accessing the greater Child Welfare System. It includes Youth Court, Chancery Court, the Administrative Office of Courts, Medicaid, Human Services, Education, Mental Health, medical services, the Attorney General, the faith-based community, and non-profit organizations. Even from a position of authority, leveraging the substantial resources these systems collectively bring to the table on behalf of children in custody is a challenge.

If we cannot successfully leverage our resources and partnerships, how can we expect individual families to do so with extremely limited time and resources to devote to the task?

If we could systemically leverage all the available resources and improve outcomes for the population served through our agency, we might be on our way to a model for a steady, persistent commitment to increase human capital per capita for the entire state.

So, how do we, as a State, create a long-term plan to which Mississippi can commit? Such a plan would not be subject to changes in political or agency leadership and would be designed to invest in the next generation of Mississippians, our children. I certainly do not have the answers, but I am convinced that to truly improve outcomes for children, we must do all we can to strengthen families and minimize exposure to trauma. We must welcome all persons, entities, and resources to the effort, and we must be transparent and selfless about the resources we bring to the table.

Is it possible to create such a plan and stick to it? I see some reasons for hope.

Governor Tate Reeves appointed me to serve not only as the Commissioner of Child Protective Services but also as the Executive Director of

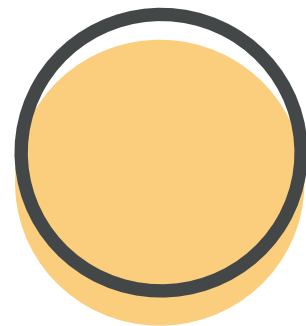
the Governor's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC). One of our first tasks was to produce an objective asset map of external resources that come into the State and State-generated resources and how they are spent on children in Mississippi. This undertaking required a transparent review of funding sources and spending. The resulting visual map provides state leaders with a tool for cohesive long-term planning.

The Mississippi Legislature has recognized the need to invest strategically in families in a lasting, systemic way. I am encouraged by the four days of public hearings on women and children held in Fall 2022. The hearings produced a record of resources and needs related to women and children in Mississippi. I hope these hearings will serve as a model for informing cohesive lasting legislative action to strengthen families.

The task is daunting, but I also believe that Mississippians can do hard things. I believe that lasting change and consistency for children is worth fighting for.

I want to thank the Children's Foundation of Mississippi and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for laying the groundwork for this conversation, and I would like to thank Governor Reeves for asking me to be a part of the conversation. Please join me in considering how we might use this data to inform our long-term plan for Mississippi children and how we might lock arms and commit to the slog that will get us, or at least the next generation of Mississippians, to a different place.





About Andrea Sanders

Andrea Sanders was appointed Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services on November 9, 2020, by Governor Tate Reeves. As both an attorney and a social worker, Sanders leads the almost 1,500-member state child welfare agency in its mission to protect Mississippi's most vulnerable children.

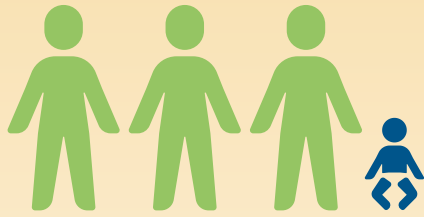
Before assuming her current responsibilities, Sanders served as General Counsel and Principal Deputy Executive Director for the Mississippi Department of Human Services where she served on the Senior Leadership Team and held administrative responsibility for the Division of Early Child Care and Education. During her tenure at MDHS, she led an agency initiative to rehabilitate the subsidized childcare program, eliminating a 25,000 child waitlist, raising rates paid to childcare providers, promoting transparency and positive communication between stakeholders and the agency, and eliminating a three-year-old federal corrective action plan.

In 2005, Ms. Sanders completed a Juris Doctorate at the Mississippi College School of Law while raising two small boys. After graduating, she worked as an attorney in private practice, and for the judiciary, prior to joining the team at MDHS in 2017. Andrea holds a master's degree in Social Work from Tulane University. She has worked as a clinical therapist with families, children, and adolescents, and as a hospital administrator in both the public and private sectors.

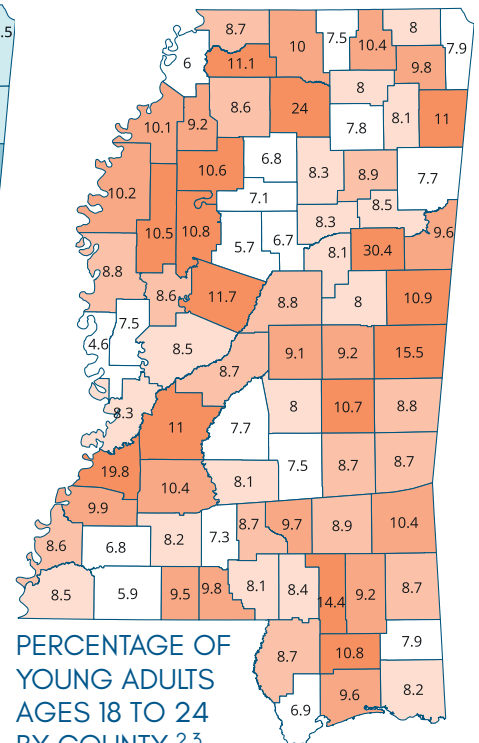
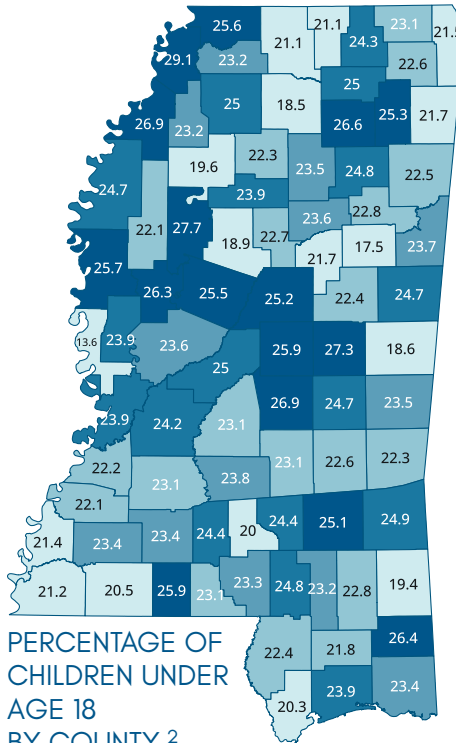
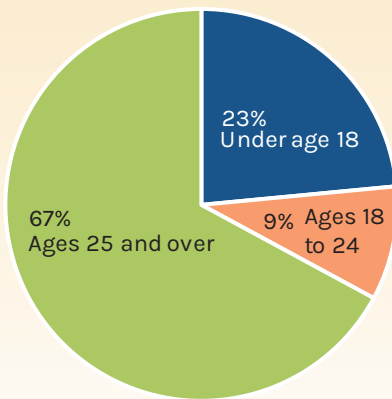
Commissioner Sanders is a wife, mother, and community volunteer. Sanders' lifelong commitment to learning through work is evidenced through her work as an adjunct professor at the Jackson State University School of Social Work, the University of Southern Mississippi School of Social Work, Hinds Community College, and as a parent mentor for low-income single mothers. Her passion is for the children and families served by our agency and for the amazingly dedicated professionals who work alongside her at MDCPS.



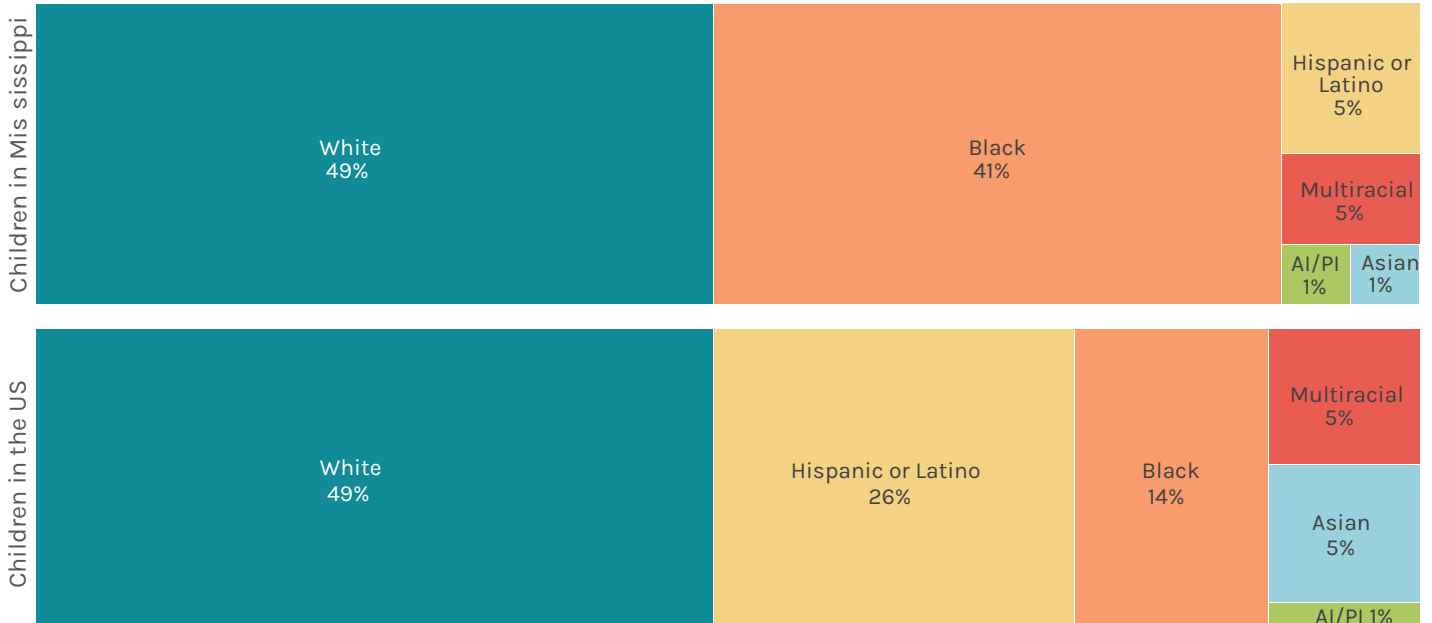
KIDS COUNT : YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS



Nearly one-fourth of Mississippians are children¹



Compared to the US overall, Mississippi has a much larger proportion of black children and a smaller proportion of Hispanic/Latino children. In both Mississippi and the US overall, white children represent less than half of the overall child population.⁴



POPULATION UNDER AGE 18 BY RACE, MISSISSIPPI AND UNITED STATES

KIDS COUNT : KEY INDICATORS

How are Mississippi's children and youth doing?

In order to provide high-quality, unbiased information that encourages action to improve the status of children, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has produced rankings of child well-being in each state for almost three decades. States receive an overall child well-being score based on 16 measures across four domains: (1) economic well-being, (2) education, (3) health, and (4) family and community. The composite scores in each of these domains are then used to rank all 50 states and to look at the overall well-being of children nationwide. States are given a rank for each domain as well as an overall rank. Each year Mississippi has been either last or near last place for most of these indicators. One area of significant improvement is our ranking in education, moving from 48th in 2017 to 39th in 2022.¹

		Year	Number	Percent/Rate
Economic Well-Being Rank: 49	Children in Poverty	2016-20	191,000	28%
	Children whose Parents Lack Secure Employment	2016-20	241,000	34%
	Children Living in Households with a High Housing Cost Burden	2016-20	189,000	27%
	Teens Not in School and Not Working	2016-20	16,000	9%
Education Rank: 39	Young Children (Ages 3 and 4) Not in School	2016-20	36,000	48%
	Fourth-Graders Not Proficient in Reading	2019	N/A	68%
	Eighth-Graders Not Proficient in Math	2019	N/A	76%
	High School Students Not Graduating on Time	2018/19	N/A	15%
Health Rank 50	Babies with low birth weight	2020	4,192	12%
	Children without Health Insurance	2016-20	38,000	5%
	Child and Teen Deaths per 100,000	2020	340	46
	Teens who are Overweight or Obese	2019-20	N/A	38%
Family and Community Rank 50	Children in Single-Parent Families	2016-20	293,000	45%
	Children in Families Where the Household Head Lacks a High School Diploma	2016-20	84,000	12%
	Children Living in High Poverty Areas	2016-20	152,000	22%
	Teen Births per 1,000	2020	2,711	28

KIDS COUNT • WHAT WOULD IT TAKE?

What would it take for MS's children to have the best outcomes in the Southeast?

Access to important health and well-being resources—such as child care, opportunities for higher education and employment, nutritious food, affordable housing,

health insurance, and a trusted medical home—varies by where people live. The data that follow examine how Mississippi youth fare on specific indicators in comparison to their peers in the same geographic region. The rankings below rate ten southeastern states (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, SC, NC, TN, LA, & MS) from 1st place (best) to 10th place (worst).¹

	COMPARED YEARS	THEN	NOW	CURRENT RANKING	TO BE #1 IN SOUTHEAST
Children in Poverty	2010 & 2021	33%	28%	10th	18%
Children whose Parents Lack Secure Employment	2010 & 2019	39%	34%	10th	26%
Children Living in Households with a High Housing Cost Burden	2010 & 2019	35%	26%	4th	22%
Teens Not in School and Not Working	2010 & 2021	13%	7%	1st	Currently 1st
Young Children (Ages 3 and 4) Not in School	(2010-12) & (2017-19)	48%	46%	1st	Currently 1st
Fourth-Graders Not Proficient in Reading	2009 & 2022	78%	69%	5th	61%
Eighth-Graders Not Proficient in Math	2009 & 2022	85%	82%	10th	75%
High School Students Not Graduating on Time	(2010-11) & (2018-19)	31%	15%	7th	8%
Low Birth Weight Babies	2010 & 2020	12%	12%	10th	9%
Children without Health Insurance	2010 & 2021	9%	6%	7th	4%
Child and Teen Deaths per 100,000	2010 & 2020	38	46	10th	29
Teens using Alcohol or Drugs	(2010-11) & (2018-19)	6%	3%	1st	Currently 1st
Children in Single-Parent Families	2010 & 2021	46%	45%	9th	33%
Children in Families Where the Household Head Lacks a High School Diploma	2010 & 2019	17%	12%	7th	10%
Children Living in High Poverty Areas	(2008-12) & (2016-20)	28%	22%	10th	8%
Teen Births per 1,000	2010 & 2020	55	28	9th	15



KIDS COUNT : EDUCATION

Mississippi's critical investments in early childhood education over the past ten years have contributed to advancements in learning among its youngest scholars and created a sturdy foundation for lifelong learning:

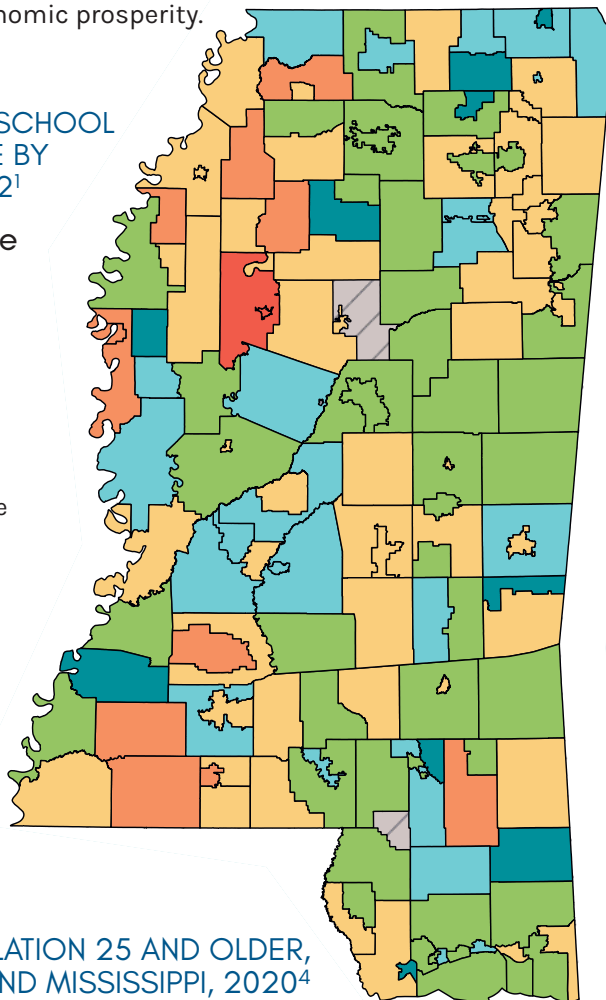
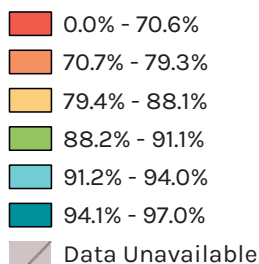
- Mississippi's high school graduation rate is steadily increasing¹
- Mississippi's elementary students achieved the largest increase in reading proficiency of any state between 2009 and 2019²; and
- More than half of MS Early Learning Collaborative pre-K students are meeting the pre-kindergarten readiness scores at the end of the year.³

Our state now needs greater supports and clearer pathways to advanced education so that Mississippians' educational successes can translate to better social and economic prosperity.

Mississippi's younger students are catching up to their peers in other states. Unfortunately, the state remains much further behind in high school and advanced education outcomes, which impacts residents' overall wellness and potential to thrive.¹ Mississippi's rate of high school graduates is steadily increasing; however, compared to the rest of the US, the state is home to far fewer adults with bachelor's and graduate degrees.⁴ Improved workforce opportunities would enable more Mississippians to stay plugged in with their communities, and would invite more people to our state to power up our economy and society.

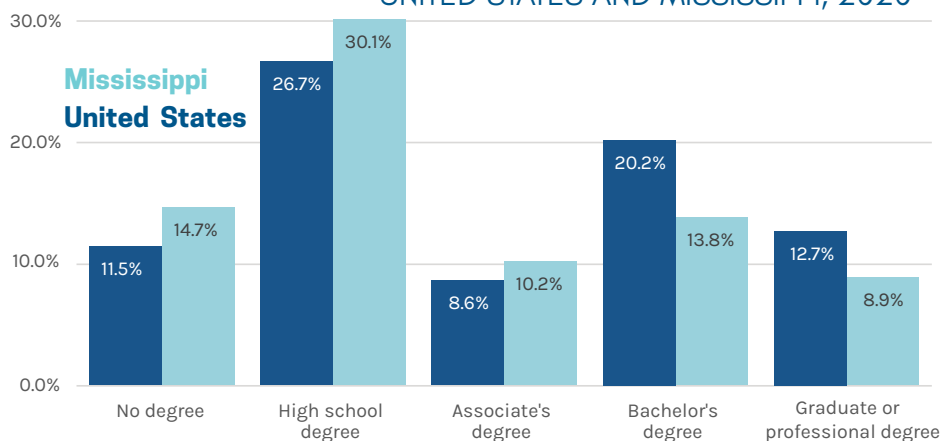
MISSISSIPPI HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE BY DISTRICT, SY 21/22¹

Graduation Rate



Mississippi has the opportunity to translate young students' learning gains into greater high school and advanced education outcomes.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG POPULATION 25 AND OLDER, UNITED STATES AND MISSISSIPPI, 2020⁴



KIDS COUNT : EDUCATION

The 2013 passage of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) has bolstered reading proficiency and improved reading outcomes across Mississippi. Mississippi's literacy law helps ensure every student reads at or above grade level by the end of grade 4. This legislation improves learning by providing immediate, intensive reading instruction and intervention to meet each student's specific reading needs. In 2016, the law was amended to include individual reading plans for students with a reading deficiency.⁵

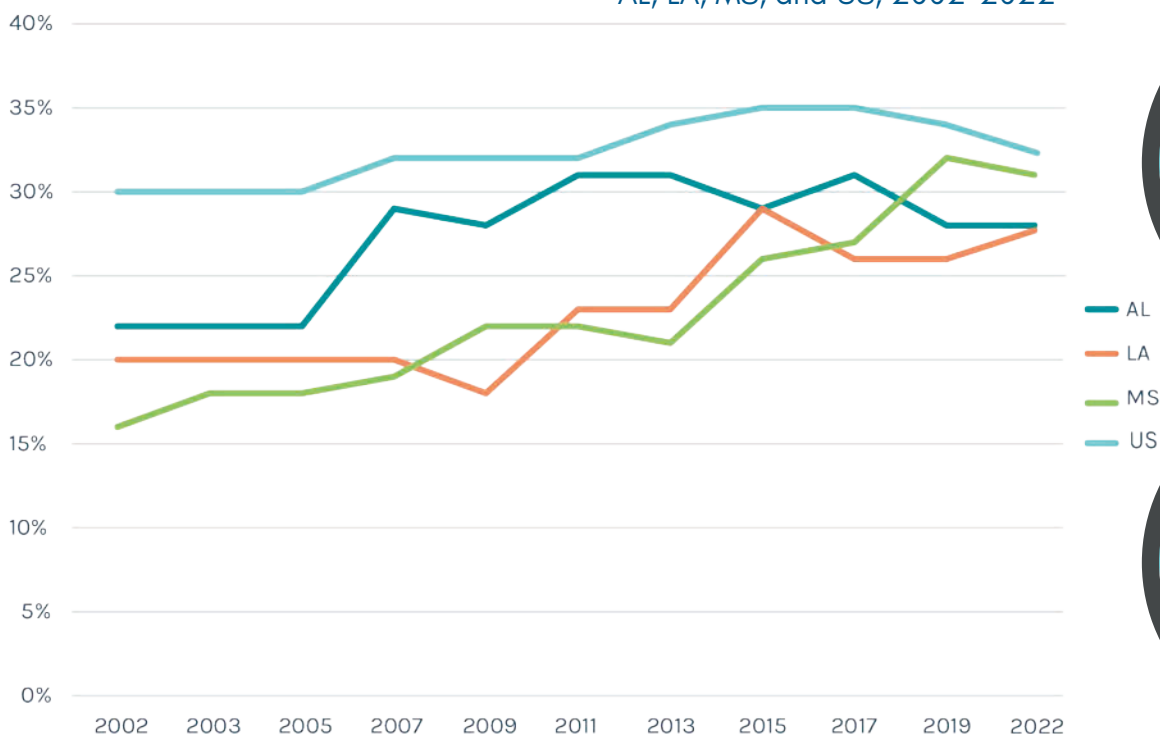
In a 2019 study conducted by the Foundation for Excellence in Education, most Mississippi teachers agreed that the LBPA did improve early literacy programs. The most helpful components of the LBPA include the state's hiring of highly qualified literacy coaches to help teachers improve reading instruction and the increased efforts to engage parents.⁶

Teachers' positive perspectives about the LBPA are reinforced by the reading proficiency scores achieved by Mississippi's fourth graders on both the 2019 and 2022 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). During the 2021-2022 school year, Mississippi ranked number one in the nation for gains in fourth grade reading and math, scoring at the national average on both indicators.⁷ Like other states, Mississippi experienced some post-pandemic declines in NAEP scores in 2022; however, Mississippi maintained its historic improvements in fourth-grade reading scores.⁷

Nationally, increased third-grade reading proficiency rates have been linked with greater high school graduation rates, which lead to employment opportunities and community engagement.⁶ Overall, graduation rates have shown a trend of steady improvement in Mississippi. Data from 2021 indicate that 88.4% of students are graduating on time.⁹ Graduation rates vary across school districts.

Improved reading proficiency yields long-term benefits for school, work, and life.

FOURTH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS, "ABOVE BASIC READING LEVEL" AL, LA, MS, and US, 2002-2022²



#1

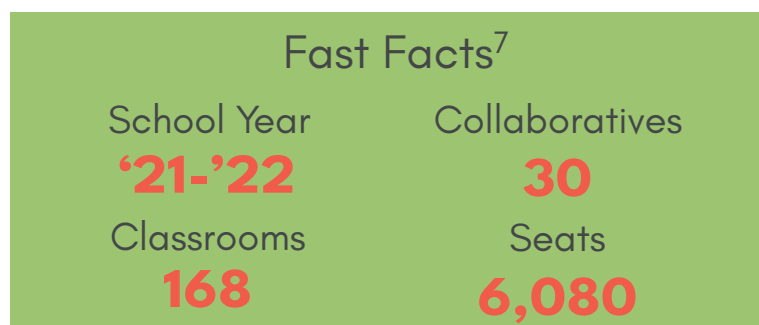
in the nation for gains in 4th grade reading & math (SY 21-22)⁷

#2

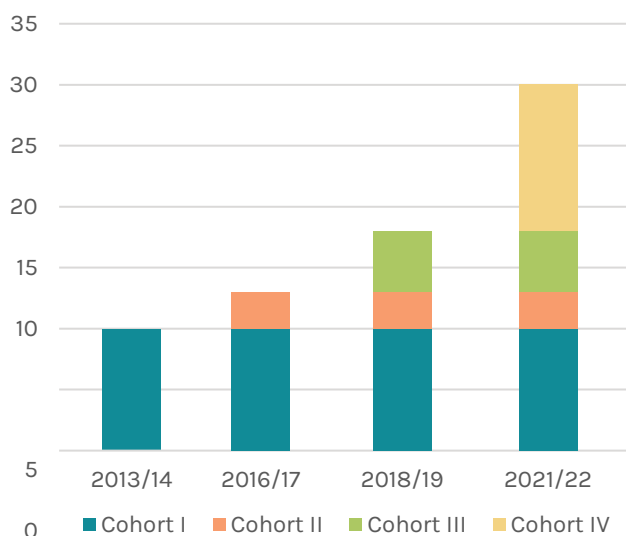
in the nation with the greatest improvements for 3 consecutive years (SY 21-22)⁷

Early Learning Collaboratives Pave the Way to Innovation

Mississippi's Early Learning Collaboratives were designed to serve as state-funded pre-k programs with strong community engagement and support. These collaborative districts encourage unique approaches to learning and the development of new standards in early care and education.⁹ With the \$24M legislative appropriation in the spring for the '22 - '23 school year, there is a capacity to serve a total of 9,120 students. In 2022, the MS legislature made a \$44M investment in high-quality early childhood programming.



PRE-K COLLABORATIVE EXPANSION OVER TIME

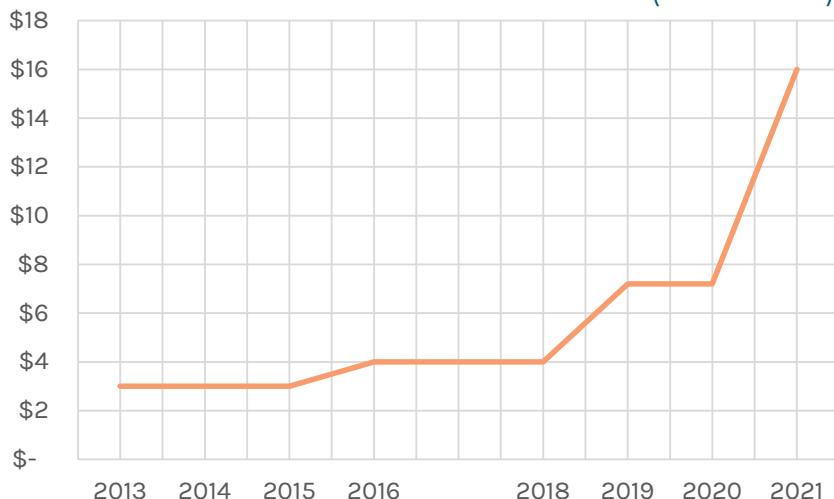


How are Early Learning Collaboratives funded?

The state of Mississippi provides half of the costs for each collaborative. As of 2020, the state provides \$2,500 per child enrolled in full-day programs. The other half of the costs must be provided by local matching funds, such as:

- Tax dollars
- Tuition
- Philanthropic contributions
- In-kind donations (facilities, equipment, food service, health screenings, etc.)
- Allowed federal dollars, such as Title I⁹

PRE-K COLLABORATIVE FUNDING OVER TIME (IN MILLIONS)



What does an Early Learning Collaborative look like?

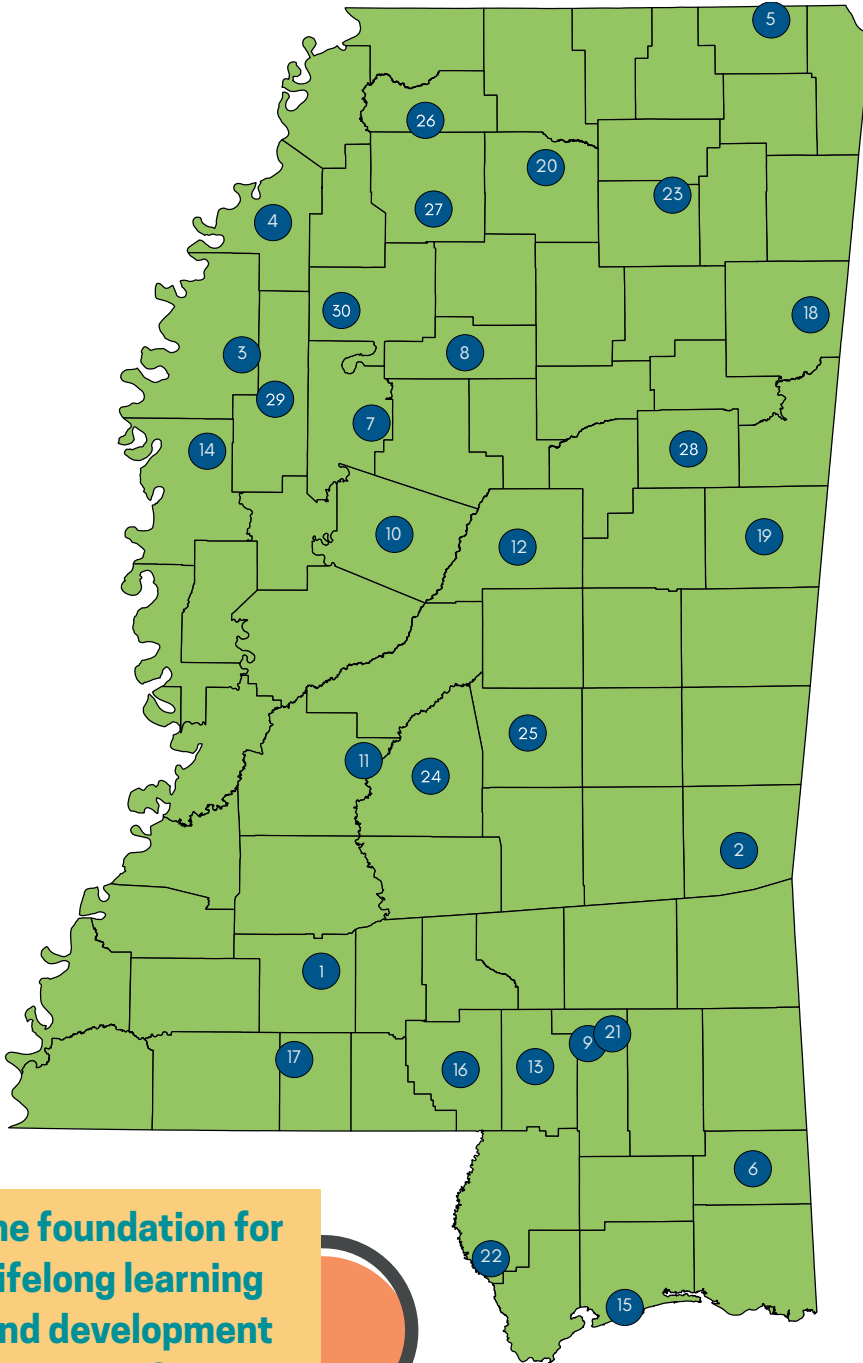
Partnerships among two or more organizations, including:

- School districts (*required*)
- Head Start agencies (*required*)
- Licensed child care centers (*optional*)
- Non-profit organizations, such as parochial/private schools (*optional*)⁹

While these partners are required to hold quarterly collaborative meetings, some collaboratives choose to meet more frequently. The specifics of how partners collaborate are up to each collaborative community. Collaboratives are also held accountable for meeting quality standards. Each collaborative must meet the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) quality benchmarks and must administer the Pre-K version of the Kindergarten readiness assessment each Fall and Spring.⁸

Investment in education results in lifelong payoffs.

Where are Mississippi's Early Learning Collaboratives?¹⁰



The foundation for
lifelong learning
and development
begins to form in
the earliest years.

1. Brookhaven
2. Clarke
3. Cleveland
4. Coahoma
5. Corinth
6. George
7. Greenwood-Leflore
8. Grenada
9. Hattiesburg
10. Holmes
11. Jackson
12. Kosciusko
13. Lamar
14. Leland
15. Long Beach
16. Marion
17. McComb
18. Monroe
19. Noxubee
20. Oxford
21. Petal
22. Picayune
23. Pontotoc
24. Rankin
25. Scott
26. Senatobia
27. South Panola
28. Starkville
29. Sunflower
30. Tallahatchie

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Continue to Support Early Learning Collaboratives

During the 2022 Mississippi Legislative session, Pre-K education funding was at its highest level, expanding the available openings for 4-year-old children across the state.¹¹ As funding increases for Pre-K Collaboratives, the potential for tax credits at the individual district level also increases. To continue supporting collaboratives, Mississippi should:

- Continue to increase state funding for Early Learning Collaboratives across the state of Mississippi
- Continue to invest proceeds from the corporate tax credit program at the community level

Expand the Reach of Literacy Coaches

Steady gains over the period of 2009-2019 resulted in a record number of 4th graders who scored at or above reading proficiency levels. Like other states, Mississippi saw a post-pandemic decline in some NAEP scores. However, data from 2022 show that the gains in 4th-grade reading proficiency have not declined. Expanding the reach of literacy coaches will strengthen support for teachers who are working to address reading challenges.

Bolster Mississippi's Workforce

The increase in high school graduation rates and the percentage of students graduating on time is encouraging. At the same time, Mississippi lags behind other states in post-secondary education (which includes associates and other certifications in addition to a four-year college degree). Sixty-five percent of all jobs in the U.S. require some post-secondary education.¹² Addressing this gap could include strategies like the following:

- Promote career readiness in addition to college readiness
- Review the effectiveness of Career Technical Education (CTE) programs across the state
- Expand dual-credit programs within high schools
- Create opportunities within local businesses for workforce development, inclusive of vocational certifications, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees

Increase Access to Data

Provide opportunities for academic researchers, state agencies, non-profits, school districts, and teachers to access available data sets to inform future policy recommendations.



KIDS COUNT • ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Mississippi's greatest resource is our people – and our state's policies shape the opportunities for our people. When we create the conditions that invite children to learn and allow adults to apply their skills, we tap into the human potential all around us. When people's potential, talents, and skills are fully realized, our communities grow stronger and more vibrant, socially and economically. When people can work, they are able to contribute to our broader community in ways that affect their families, their neighborhoods, and the entire state. Not only is it the foundation for people's sense of self-worth and well-being, but good jobs also enable more members to plug in and power up our communities, which returns benefits in countless ways.

Over time, our state has built programs and services that work a lot like a system of train tracks. This system is designed to move our communities forward. The objective of Mississippi's various initiatives is to support the well-being of children and families, making our communities more socially and economically vibrant.

At times, however, these tracks lack a connection that would enable them to function as intended. A family breadwinner, for example, might be eligible for an education grant but unable to take advantage of it because quality childcare is too expensive or unavailable. The solution might involve a subsidy, but it might be as simple as a caseworker starting a conversation about friends and family who might be reliable help. Aligning these programs, combining them when needed, and making necessary adjustments, will keep them on the rails and make our work more effective. Lining up the programs serving children and adults is a two-generation approach, and it holds promise for getting our state where it needs to go.

This section provides some information about childhood poverty and employment and addresses key areas that can improve economic well-being and quality of life. These include childcare access, increasing educational and employment opportunities, and defining and creating pathways to keep college and credentialed graduates in Mississippi. The factors contributing to our challenges point to the need for innovative solutions.

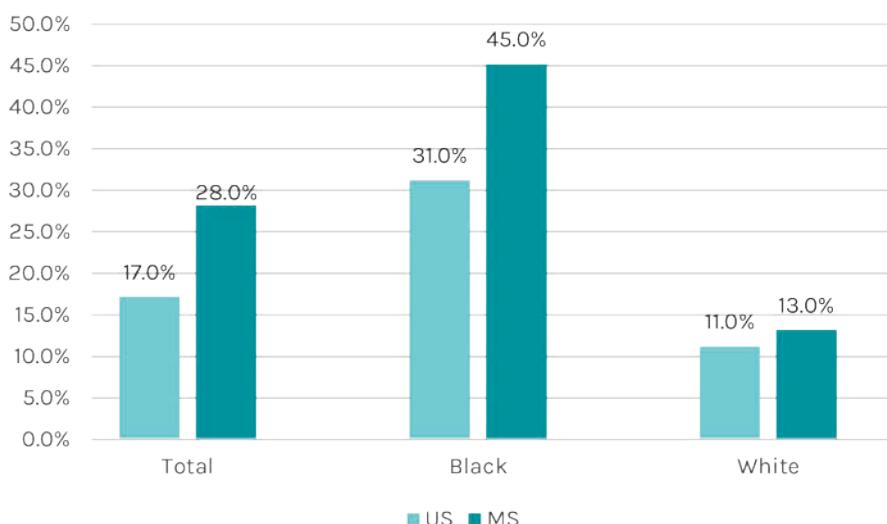
When people's potential, talents, and skills are fully realized, our communities grow stronger and more vibrant.

Child Poverty

To make our state a thriving place to live and work, we need to make it a place where everyone can realize their potential, which begins at the earliest stages of a child's life.

Overall, more than one in four (28%) of Mississippi's children live in households experiencing poverty, compared to 17% nationally.¹ This does not tell the full story, given the stark racial disparities in poverty (45% black compared to 13% white). Overall, 25% of Mississippi's children live in households with food insecurity.

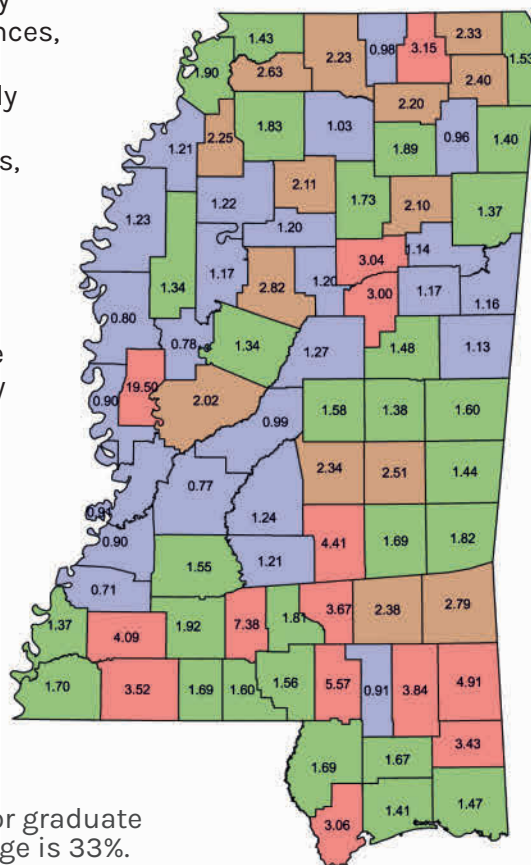
CHILD POVERTY, US AND MS, BY RACE (2021)¹



Childcare Access

Mississippi has more children than the available licensed childcare slots across the state. In 2020, it was estimated that breakdowns in childcare resulted in an annual loss of \$673 million for Mississippi's economy.³ In addition to access, cost proves to be a big obstacle for many Mississippi families for whom childcare is prohibitively expensive. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises that childcare should amount to no more than 7% of a household's budget, yet many Mississippi families spend well beyond that.⁴

Challenges securing consistent, quality childcare often lead to workforce absences, turnover, and higher unemployment.³ Childcare inaccessibility also frequently prevents young adults from pursuing postsecondary education, certifications, and training programs that could advance their careers. A 2021 report released by the Mississippi Economic Council found that there is no shortage of interest in continued learning.⁵ Many Mississippi parents are enrolled or interested in postsecondary education or training programs, but challenges securing consistent childcare caused 41% to withdraw or postpone coursework or job training programs.³



MISSISSIPPI EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE OPTIONS
JULY 2022

RATIO OF CHILDREN TO SEATS IN
LICENSED CHILD CARE SEATS

Ratio of Children to Licensed Seats

- 0.71 - 1.27
- 1.27 - 1.92
- 1.92 - 2.82
- 2.82 - 19.5

Educational Attainment

Mississippi ranks last in the nation for four-year degrees earned.⁶ The percentage of Mississippians who earn a bachelor's or graduate degree is 23%, while the national average is 33%. Almost half (49%) of Mississippi's children live in households where their primary caregivers do not hold any college degrees, compared to 43% nationally. Moreover, Mississippi's rate of high school diplomas or GEDs earned by household heads is decreasing. In 2015, 55% of household heads held at least a high school diploma or GED. That number decreased by more than ten percent to 49% in 2019.⁷

Mississippi's Education Achievement Council (EAC) was established in 2010 for the purpose of sustaining attention to the state's goal of increasing the educational attainment and skill levels of the state's working-age population.⁸

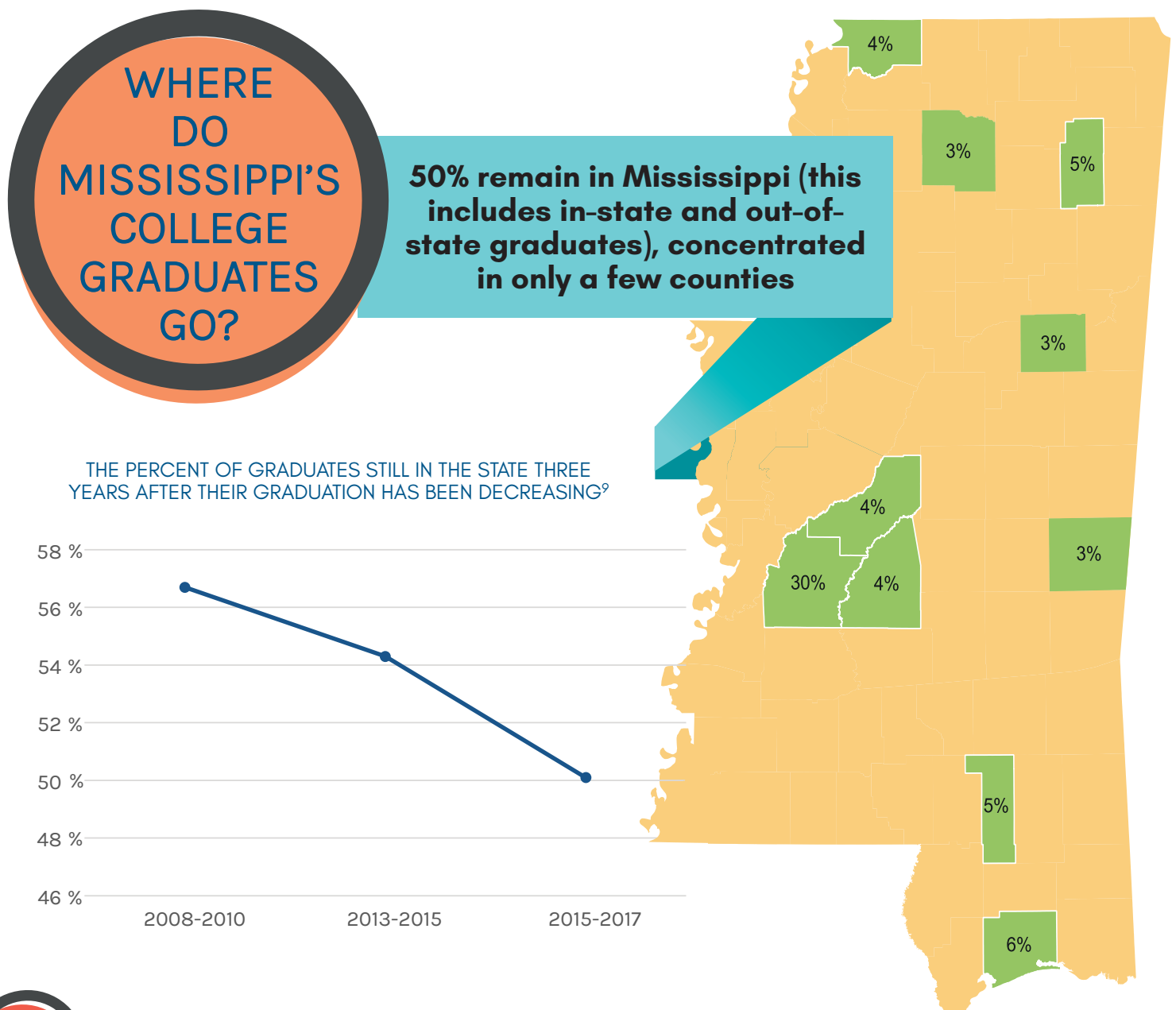
In October 2020, the EAC passed a resolution to adopt a postsecondary attainment goal in the state of Mississippi. In that resolution, they established two goals:

- By 2030, Mississippi will increase the postsecondary attainment of its workforce to 55%.
- By 2035, Mississippi will increase the postsecondary attainment of its workforce to 60%.⁸

Retention of Mississippians with Degrees

Many students who do obtain a degree from a Mississippi public university do not stay in the state long-term. Of the students (in-state and out-of-state) who attended a public university in Mississippi between 2015-2017, only half remained in Mississippi by 2020.⁹ It should also be noted that approximately 35% of Mississippi college students are out-of-state students.¹⁰

The employment of public university graduates remaining in the state is concentrated in ten counties. From 2015-17, about 67% worked in one of those counties, with nearly half working in either Hinds, Harrison, Lee, Forrest, or Rankin counties.⁹ Increasing the number of credentialed and college graduates' employment opportunities across the state is essential.



Map used with permission from the Office of the State Auditor

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Increase Access to Affordable, High-Quality Childcare

The data discussed in this section make one thing obvious: gains in employment and higher education will require more accessible childcare throughout the state. Our state depends on the contributions of all of our citizens as members of the labor force and as active participants in our society and economy. By devoting resources to improving child development programs and services, we can ensure that people don't have to choose between work and quality care for their children. The following strategies could help our state realize this goal:

- Expand the number of childcare vouchers available to increase opportunities for young children and their families
- Unlink the child support application from approval of childcare vouchers through the Child Care and Development Fund
- Implement a quality support system in concert with childcare professionals
- Conduct research to determine best practices and opportunities to increase and sustain quality early care and education
- Invest in developing more quality childcare slots so parents have increased opportunities to return to the workforce and contribute to the economy

Invest in Continued Learning and Retention of Mississippi's Educated and Skilled Work Force

A 2021 Mississippi Economic Council (MEC) survey of business and community leaders identified concerns about job applicants' career readiness as the number one issue in every community.⁵

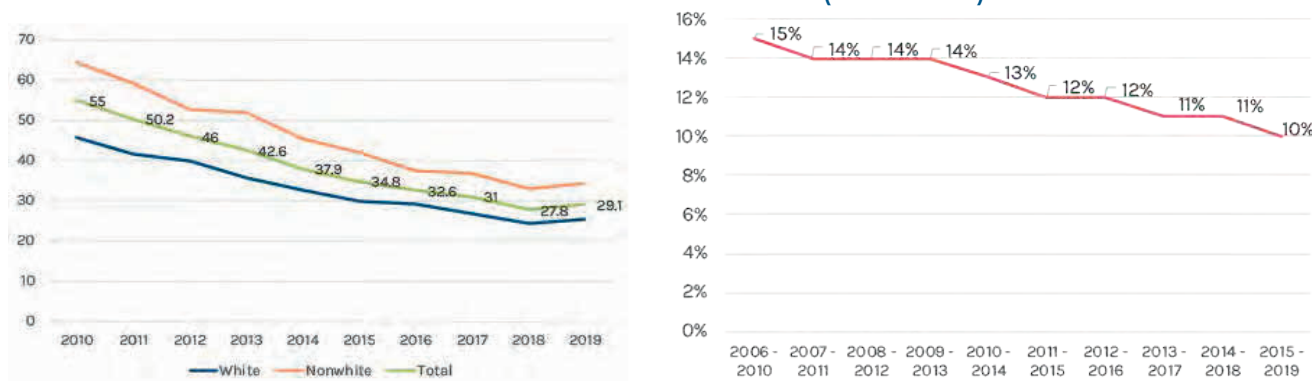
- Define pathways to postsecondary education to enhance job opportunities
- Support financial incentives for high school graduates and other credentialed individuals to live and work in Mississippi
- Incentivize more university graduates to remain in the state via paid fellowships, similar to that of the State Auditor's, that could include tuition coverage, a guaranteed summer internship, and guaranteed employment in the state¹¹

Because a strong Mississippi depends on its children's well-being, prioritizing our young people's needs will benefit us all. Mississippi has used some federal stimulus money, such as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), to improve several key indicators impacting families and communities. Further, HB 1313 (passed in 2022) ensured that youth transitioning from foster care could receive support for rent and other costs while pursuing higher education. In the past year, Mississippi expanded resources to help prevent teen pregnancy, support young parents, and assist youth transitioning out of foster care.

Teen Pregnancy and Early Parenthood

Although the number of teens giving birth has steadily declined in the past two decades, Mississippi still has the nation's highest rate of teen births. In 2020, there were approximately 28 births per 1,000 teen females in Mississippi.¹ After the Dobbs decision, these rates are likely to rise.² From 2015 to 2019, Mississippi had approximately 31,000 young parents.³

RATE OF LIVE BIRTHS TO MISSISSIPPI TEENS (AGES 15-19)⁴



When it comes to creating a powerful network of support for our young people, the place to begin is by addressing the challenges associated with teen pregnancy and early parenthood. This is because the challenges that teen parents and their children experience compound over time.

- Teen mothers are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers: only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22, compared to 90% of women who do not give birth during high school.⁵
- Fewer than 2% of teen mothers earn a college degree by age 30.⁶
- When pregnancy during the teen years can be avoided, youth can continue their education and have an increased likelihood of entering higher-wage employment.⁷
- Children born to teen parents generally experience worse health and educational outcomes, higher underemployment, and an increased likelihood of incarceration.⁷

Because the issues compound over time (for parent and child), reducing the cost of teen pregnancy is not as simple as reducing the rate of teen pregnancy. Early support for young parents and their children reduces the tax burden associated with foster care, incarceration, unemployment and underemployment, and reliance on public benefits.⁸

These challenges are complex but costly, making them all the more important to address early. While reducing the rate of teen pregnancy is important, investments in family planning, early childhood education, and the foster care system bring benefits that compound over the lifespan of multiple generations.

Low Birth Weight

In 2021, Mississippi had the highest rate of low birth weights in the nation.⁹ Normal birth weight is essential for children's health and developmental outcomes: low birth weights increase the likelihood of developmental delays and chronic health conditions.

Lower birth weights and very low birth weights (<2,500 grams and <1,500 grams, respectively) correlate with younger maternal age because pregnant teenagers are more likely to begin prenatal care later during gestation than pregnant adults.¹⁰ In 2020, there were 2,756 births to teen moms (19 and under) in Mississippi,¹¹ most of whom were 18 or 19 years old. Nearly 400 low-birth-weight babies were born to teen moms in 2020 in Mississippi.⁹

But we have solutions that have been shown to work.

Family Planning

Youth-friendly reproductive health services play an important role, both in preventing teen pregnancy and in ensuring that pregnant teens receive the prenatal care necessary for child and maternal well-being.

Ensuring young parents have access to prenatal and perinatal care mitigates the chances of low and very low birth weights. Mississippi's 2022 Title X awardee, the non-profit Converge, plans to implement new strategies to make family planning more accessible across the state. One of those strategies includes the use of telemedicine, which can extend the reach to rural or medically-underserved areas.¹² Our shared civic, social, and economic well-being depends on the contributions and participation of everyone – this means that we must do more to ensure that everyone across Mississippi has what they need to be healthy and well.

One third of teen moms in Mississippi did not seek prenatal care until the second or third trimester or did not seek prenatal care at all, as compared to 22% of US moms older than 20.¹⁰

Foster Youth

In 2021, 3,728 Mississippi children were in foster care.¹³ Foster youth encounter many obstacles to success. We can and must do more to ensure that our foster youth are equipped with resources to help them find their footing. Foster youth have a high prevalence of multiple chronic medical, developmental, and mental health conditions, which are frequently exacerbated by disruptions to provider or family continuity.¹⁴ Even as foster youth mature and become more autonomous, many encounter barriers to accessing their own medical history (MS-YIT).¹⁵ Additionally, they are at higher risk for low educational attainment and becoming a teen parent. As foster youth transition out of care, they face higher rates of housing insecurity and homelessness, healthcare lapses, and unemployment or unstable employment than youth who did not spend time in care.^{16,17,18} For almost every indicator discussed below, Mississippi's foster youth fare worse than do foster youth nationally.

Education

According to the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), in 2017, former foster youth in Mississippi graduated high school or attained a GED at a higher rate (75%) than former foster youth nationally (69%) by age 21.¹⁸ This underscores the successes that Mississippi has achieved regarding high school graduation over the past several years (see the Education section for more details).

Continuing Education

According to the same NYTD (2017) study, fewer foster youth in Mississippi were currently enrolled in continuing education (17%) than were former foster youth nationally (28%).¹⁹

Mental Health

Foster youth participants of the MS-YIT survey showed signs of serious mental illness at five times the rate of youth nationally.¹⁶

Housing Insecurity

Nationally, 20% of children who transition out of foster care experience homelessness before the age of 21.^{20,21} Fifty percent of respondents to the MS-YIT reported being unsure of where they would sleep some or many nights, indicating that youth exiting foster care in Mississippi experience housing insecurity much more frequently than youth nationally.¹⁵

Mississippi foster youth also reported obstacles and unfamiliarity in some independence-related domains. On the 2022 Mississippi-Youth in Transition (MS-YIT) survey, foster youth reported feeling most confident about methods of finding a job or keeping themselves healthy. They were much less likely to express confidence about securing benefits, locating housing, or navigating college applications, financial aid, and scholarships. Only 20% of MS-YIT respondents reported knowing how to receive college assistance.¹⁵

In 2022, the Mississippi state legislature appropriated funds to provide tuition assistance, rental assistance, and incidental fees for Mississippi youth who have been involved in the foster care system and are engaged in further education: the Fostering Access and Inspiring True Hope (FAITH) Scholarship Program (HB1313).²² This program provides a much-needed pathway to education, higher earnings, and autonomy.

And this support points the way to the next steps: navigating college applications and aid (one of the independence-related domains that foster youth find most unfamiliar). Given that roughly 38% as reported in the MS-YIT know "almost nothing" about the process, while another 42% reported knowing only "a little," targeted support could yield great results.¹⁵

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Parents who secure consistent childcare are more likely to remain employed and/or continue their education. Quality early care and education improves the lives of children in the following ways: children see improved literacy, critical thinking, social-emotional development, and motor skills.²³

Increase access to early childhood education programs.

See page 15 under Economic Policy Recommendations for more information.

Increase access to family planning services (e.g. telemedicine).

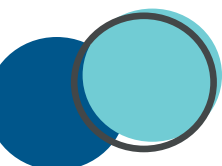
National standards for caseworker ratios range from 12-15 children per caseworker (Child Welfare League of America) to <24 (Council on Accreditation).²⁴ Lowering the caseloads for each support specialist would increase the individualized support available to foster youth and allow specialists to continue supporting youth into early adulthood.

Increase funding to MDCPS to expand the number of transition support specialists.

Conduct research to determine best practices for increasing housing security for Mississippi's youth exiting foster care.

Provide financial incentives for businesses and non-profits to help ensure continued stability and success of youth transitioning out of foster care.

One such program was recently created through a partnership among Wendy's Workforce Development Program, the Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services (MDCPS), and Mississippi Families for Kids. It offers training, counseling, and workforce opportunities at Wendy's restaurants to foster youth who have a transportation plan and positive behavior reports from their MDCPS caseworkers. Participating youth are also given two stipends to assist with uniforms, gas, and other employment expenses. Youth work alongside restaurant managers who are given training in resolving trauma-induced behaviors.²⁵



Where we live, work, learn and play affects our health. Social determinants of health (SDOH) like these have major impacts on people's health, well-being, and quality of life:

- Safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods
- Protection from discrimination and violence
- Access to nutritious foods
- Education and career opportunities
- Opportunities for physical activity
- Language and literacy skills
- Access to unpolluted water and air
- Access to timely, high-quality healthcare¹

Data collected between 2019 and 2020 indicate that 38% of Mississippi's children aged 10-17 are overweight or obese.² Nationally, 32% of youth in this age range are overweight or obese.³ Mississippi youth exercise more regularly than do youth nationally⁴, and the rates at which Mississippi teens smoke and vape is trending downward.

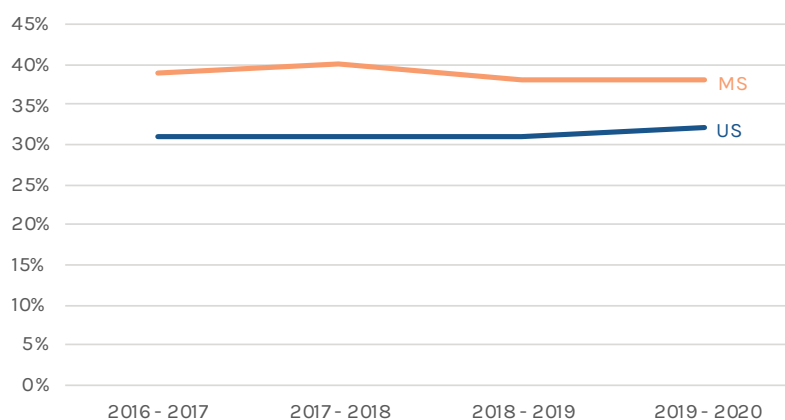
While nutrition education and physical education can inform and empower individuals, research reveals a need for more statewide action to improve SDOH. We know that if we change the conditions in which our young people live, learn, and play, we can shape their health outcomes for their lifetime.

Mississippi youth ages 6-17 consistently get more physical activity than do youth nationally. Of those surveyed in the 2020-2021 school year, 25.2% of Mississippi youth were physically active for at least 60 minutes each day in the week prior, whereas 20.5% of youth nationally reported the same.⁴

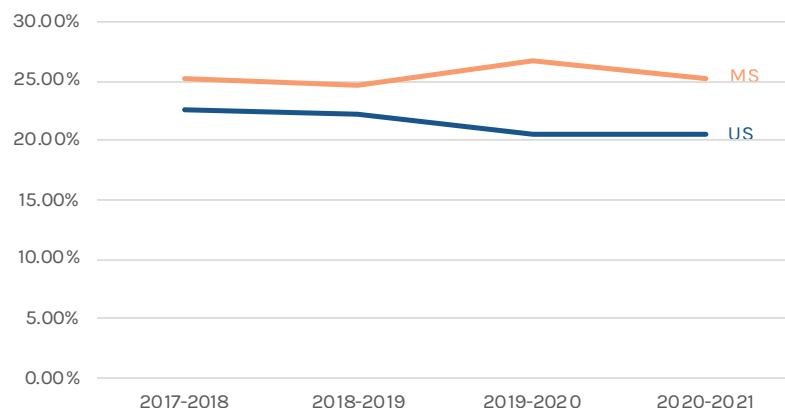
Engaging in regular physical activity is one way to reduce obesity and can result in improved heart, bone, and cognitive health; however, physical activity is only one variable in the formula for good health.^{5,6}

Social determinants of health (SDOH) can contribute to health disparities and inequities. For example, people who don't have access to grocery stores with healthy foods are less likely to follow a nutritious diet than those who live in areas with healthier food options, raising their risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and a shorter life expectancy. When healthy options are not available, promoting healthy choices is not an effective strategy to eliminate health disparities. Improving the quality of the environment in which families live is crucial to bettering the lives of Mississippians and building a strong economic and social foundation for all of Mississippi.¹

THE OBESITY RATE FOR YOUTH IN MISSISSIPPI AGED 10 - 17 IS CONSISTENTLY HIGHER THAN THE RATE FOR THE US^{2,3}



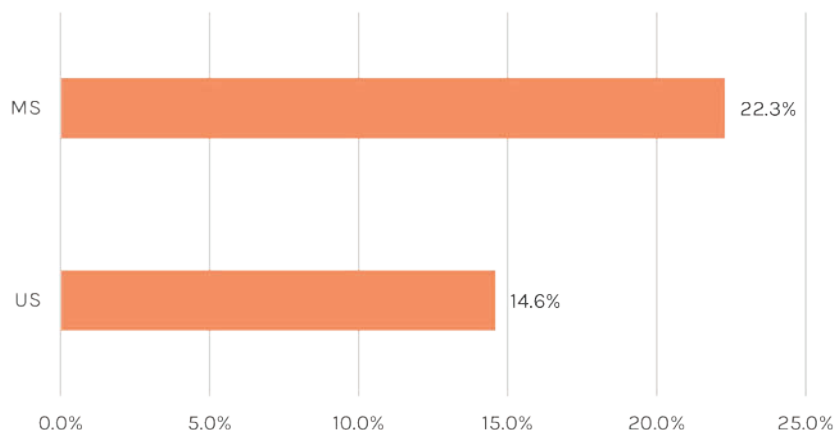
YOUTH AGE 6 - 17 IN MISSISSIPPI ENGAGED IN 60 MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE PAST WEEK AT HIGHER RATES THAN DID YOUTH IN US OVERALL⁴



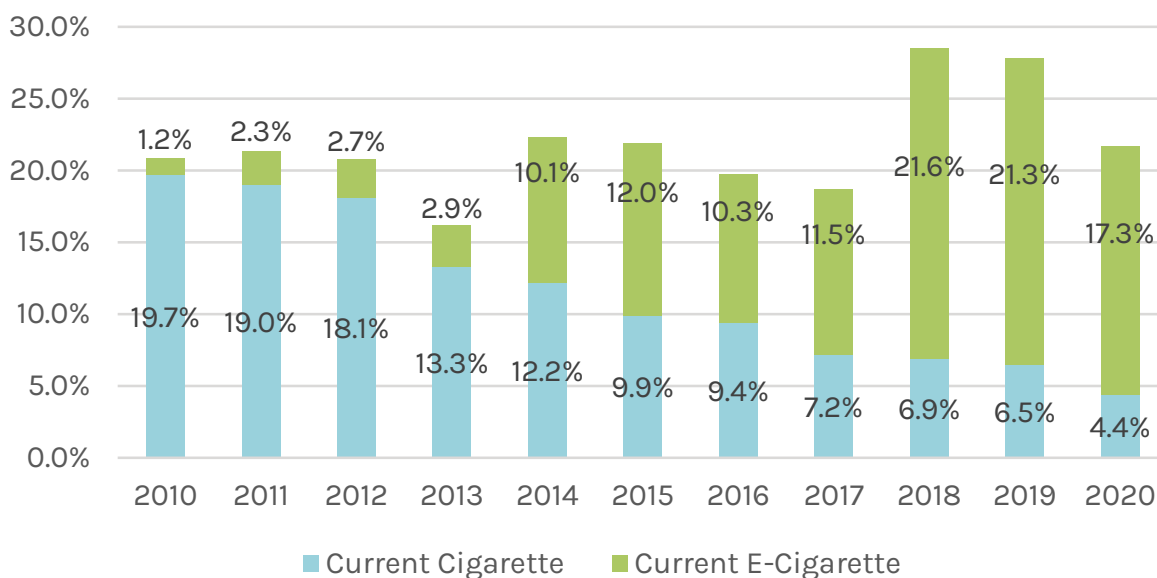
KIDS COUNT : HEALTH

Obesity is strongly associated with food insecurity because families who lack accessibility or means often rely on meals that are lacking in nutrition.⁷ Of the 50 states, Mississippi has the highest rate of food insecurity.⁸ Nearly 1 in 4 Mississippi children go to bed hungry at night.⁹ These numbers show us that we need to do better for counties with high rates of unemployment and child poverty. Mississippi children experience some of the highest rates of food insecurity: in counties such as Issaquena, Claiborne, and Jefferson, more than 40% of children (2 in 5) are food insecure.⁹

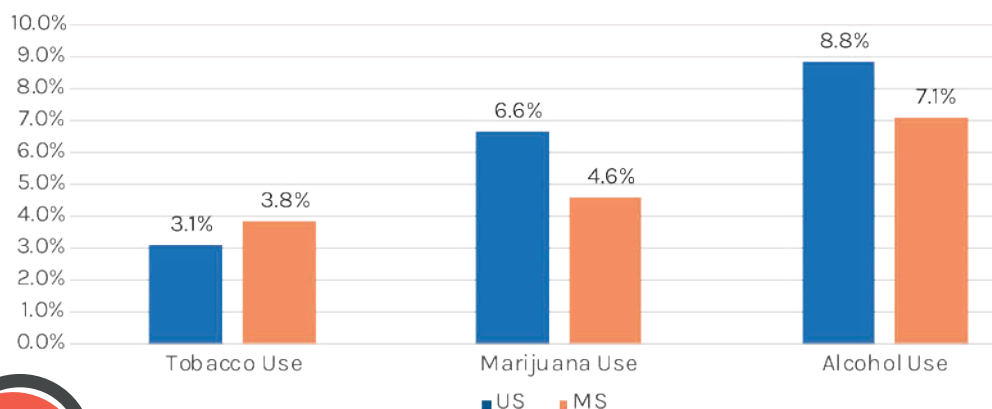
THE FOOD INSECURITY RATE IN MISSISSIPPI IS HIGHER THAN THE RATE FOR THE US⁸



CIGARETTE AND E-CIGARETTE USE IN THE PAST 30 DAYS AMONG MS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS¹⁰



SUBSTANCE USE RATES IN THE PAST 30 DAYS ARE LOWER FOR YOUTH AGED 12 - 17 IN MISSISSIPPI THAN NATIONALLY¹¹



Smoking is an activity that increases the risk of heart problems and lung cancer.⁶ In 2019-2020, youth ages 12-17 in Mississippi reported having used tobacco slightly more in the past month than do youth nationally. However, cigarette smoking has rapidly declined among Mississippi's high school students. While e-cigarettes have become more popular than traditional cigarettes, e-cigarette use has steadily declined since 2018.^{10,11}

Did you know...

Because mental health is key to functioning, there is a new national suicide and crisis lifeline number, **988**, for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis. The lifeline routes callers to local crisis counselors based on callers' area codes. When local crisis centers are not able to answer calls, callers are routed to a national crisis center. There are translation services available for over 250 languages, and crisis counselors are also able to take calls from anyone concerned about a friend or family member who is experiencing a mental health crisis.¹²

Currently, a gap exists between the number of youth who could benefit from care and the mental health resources available across the state. Schools are an important venue for students to receive psychological support, but the number of school-funded psychologists in Mississippi remains low. In 2021, only 190 psychologists were employed in the 1,041 schools across the state.²²

Outside of school, Mississippi youth confront additional barriers to mental healthcare. Fifteen percent of Mississippi youth do not have insurance coverage for mental health services (one of the highest percentages in the nation).²³

Mental Health

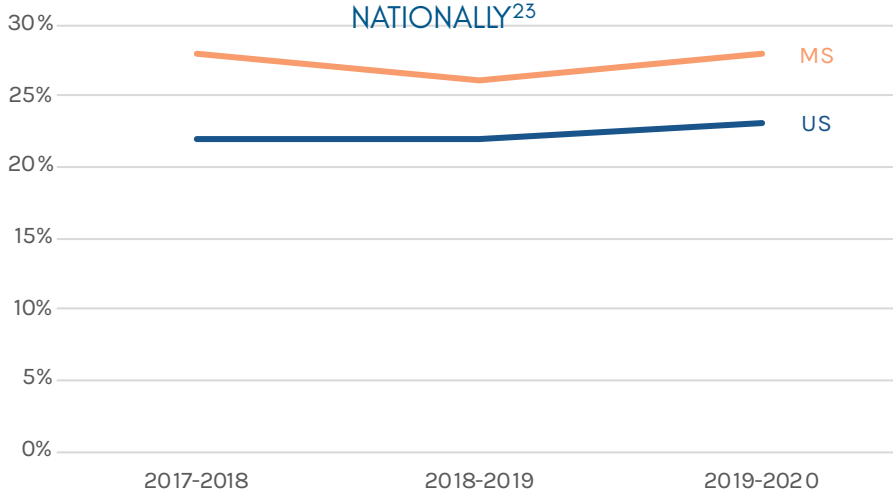
Social determinants of health, such as access to nutritious food or opportunities for physical activity can also have an impact on mental health.¹³ Impacts from SDOH may begin in early childhood, and effective intervention may require access to timely, high-quality healthcare (which is itself considered a SDOH). Early intervention is important because mental health impacts overall health.¹⁴

Mississippi youth experience mental health challenges at high rates and significant gaps exist in mental healthcare access to address them.¹⁵

Between 2019 and 2020, 28% of Mississippi children were diagnosed with an emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition, compared to 23% of children nationally.¹⁵ Since that time, stress and alienation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to rising rates of youth mental health crises, as revealed by a rise in mental health-related ER visits between March and October of 2020. Compared to 2019 data, this period showed a 24% increase for children ages 5-11 and 21% for those ages 12-17 in Mississippi.¹⁶ In 2021, 67% of Mississippi youth who experienced depression did not receive any mental health care.¹⁷ Mental health conditions can affect youths' performance in school as well as their willingness to engage in risky behavior such as drug use, violence, or risky sex.¹⁸

Research also shows a significant relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)--potentially traumatic experiences--and higher risks for mental health issues.¹⁹ ACEs are a major concern for Mississippi children, as the state ranks 42nd on this measure.²⁰ ACEs put children at greater risk for experiencing asthma, cancer, diabetes, depression, and mental illness in adulthood.²¹

RATES OF EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIORAL, AND DEVELOPMENTAL CONDITIONS ARE HIGHER FOR CHILDREN IN MISSISSIPPI THAN NATIONALLY²³



POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**Increase Access to Healthy Foods**

To increase access to healthier foods, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends using existing systems where possible. Proposed strategies include the following:

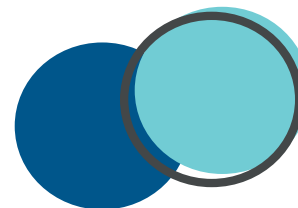
- Increase the availability of produce at smaller stores such as gas stations and chain convenience stores already present in communities
- Incentivize a mobile food retailer or mobile farmer's market to sell produce in underserved communities
- Incentivize full-service grocers to locate in food deserts.²⁵ One recent example of this is a grocery store that opened in Webb, Mississippi (a former food desert) to ensure that families now have access to high-quality produce. Farmacy Marketplace, backed by a workforce development grant, also provides new job opportunities to community members.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, youth report higher rates of feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. Access to mental health services is also reported to be difficult for youth in need of services, with 67% of youth who had depression being unable to receive support from a mental health professional in the past year.¹⁷

Increase Access to Mental Health Services

Strategies for improving access include the following:

- Train parents, teachers, childcare providers, and others who care for children to identify the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges
- Increase the number of mental healthcare providers in schools
- Increase youth mental healthcare services via Medicaid



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About the Annie E. Casey Foundation – a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work, and grow. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT® (LA INFANCIA CUENTA™) is a national and state effort to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and advocates with benchmarks of child well-being, the Foundation seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to enable all children to succeed. Nationally, the Foundation produces KIDS COUNT publications on key areas of well-being, including the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book and periodic reports on critical child and family policy issues. The Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center – at datacenter.kidscount.org – provides the best available data on child well-being in the United States. Additionally, the Foundation funds the KIDS COUNT Network – which counts members from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands – to provide a more detailed, local picture of how children are faring.

About the Children's Foundation of Mississippi – CFM is focused on improving the policies and systems that affect Mississippi children's well-being. We were founded in 2019 as a 501 (c) 3 to serve as a convener, facilitator, advocate and catalyst for positive change. Since January 2020, the Children's Foundation has been home to Mississippi KIDS COUNT. The Children's Foundation produces the annual Mississippi KIDS COUNT Factbook and works in concert with the national KIDS COUNT Data Center. Additional recent publications include Mississippi's first ever Risk and Reach Report (2021), as well as the CFM's Blueprint for Improving the Future of Mississippi's Children (2021 and 2022, Phase I and Phase II, respectively). We recognize that for Mississippi to reach its potential, our children must first reach theirs.





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