

**THE  
NORTH MISSISSIPPI REGION  
LABOR AVAILABILITY REPORT**

**September, 2007**

**Compiled and Prepared by  
THE PATHFINDERS**



**Dallas, Texas**

# MISSISSIPPI REGIONAL LABOR FORCE STUDY

2007

Local developers and sponsors in TVA/NMIDA 36 county region supported an updated Labor Force Study in 2007.

*Includes:*

- An overall assessment of the workforce with the employers' views of the total workforce and national comparative observations
- Under-employed workers; employment in the furniture industry and transferability of those skills to auto suppliers
- Availability of employees who have the capacity to perform auto sector related skills including skills of those graduating from area universities, community colleges, and spouses not currently in the work force.
- Current skill sets of the existing work force and willingness to upgrade those skill sets.

## SPONSORS

**Mississippi Development Authority**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Pathfinders has employed its experience in workforce assessments for corporate site-selection clients and civilian workforce assessments for the Department of Defense in locations that faced military base closures to produce this evaluation of the North Mississippi area workforce. The information presented in this report has been developed independently of the client, and the client has not influenced the findings.

The Pathfinders functions as a site-selection consultant to many of America's largest corporations, including companies such as AT&T, DuPont, Celanese, 3M Corporation, IMC Global, Singapore Aerospace, AIG, UPS, and Lockheed Martin. The question that most often drives the search for a new business location is whether the candidate location has the workforce needed, and a workforce analysis has been a key component of the site searches conducted for these clients. Senior human resources executives from among corporate clients assisted in refining this methodology and report format. Companies making location decisions based upon these surveys have reported that when staffing actually began, the numbers reported by The Pathfinders proved to be accurate.

In a poll of its corporate clients, The Pathfinders found that those clients' experiences suggest that new hires for new operations typically do not come from the ranks of the unemployed. Instead, these clients and other companies staff a new operation principally with individuals who are working but who desire better jobs and who appear to possess the skills, education, and experience to qualify them for those better jobs. By that definition, those individuals can be considered "underemployed" and are identified as such in this report. The type of quality employer that the North Mississippi region is attempting to attract will typically hire people who come from this group. As a consequence, The Pathfinders was retained to quantify the extent to which underemployment exists in the area, as well as to document the cost, skills, experience, and education of that hidden workforce. This report represents the objective and professional view of The Pathfinders with regard to workforce availability, cost, skills, and quality that a new employer can expect in the North Mississippi region.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The North Mississippi area has a household population of approximately 1,146,500 and a civilian labor force of approximately 544,000.
- North Mississippi has a pool of approximately 34,100 unemployed persons who are actively seeking work.
- A new employer will be able to attract employees from an additional pool of about 46,000 workers. These individuals are currently employed and have indicated an interest in changing jobs. These potentially available workers are referred to in this report as the “underemployed” because they appear to possess the skills, experience, and education to qualify them for the pay rates at which they would take a new job.
- The desired pay rates of these underemployed workers are reasonable when compared to their existing pay rates. The median current pay rate of the underemployed workers is \$14.14 per hour, and the median desired pay rate of the underemployed workers is \$15.79 per hour.
- About 25% of the underemployed workers would take a new job for \$11.52 per hour or less. At the upper end, the 25% most qualified and experienced will command more than \$21.42 per hour.
- Roughly 9,000 people, neither employed nor seeking work, might re-enter the workforce for the proper job.
- In total, the North Mississippi area has 89,100 available workers for new or expanding businesses.



## METHODOLOGY

Published government statistics report wages and employment for the entire workforce of an area, even though most of that workforce has no interest in changing jobs. This report, prepared by The Pathfinders, includes data on those people in the area who desire to change jobs and who would be potential candidate workers for a new employer. As opposed to average wages, this report quantifies the number of those workers available for an employer in various wage ranges. Also included as potential workers are the unemployed who are actively seeking work and that segment of individuals who might consider re-entering the workforce for a good job.

The first step in assessing the workforce of the North Mississippi area was to determine the boundaries of the area to be assessed. To accomplish this task, The Pathfinders applied the same reasoning that would be used during a site search for a corporate client considering the area as a potential location. The North Mississippi survey area includes those locations from which workers might be drawn to a new employer. The survey area consists of the following counties in North Mississippi:

Alcorn	Holmes	Montgomery	Tallahatchie
Attala	Itawamba	Neshoba	Tate
Benton	Kemper	Noxubee	Tippah
Calhoun	Lafayette	Oktibbeha	Tishomingo
Carroll	Leake	Panola	Union
Chickasaw	Lee	Pontotoc	Webster
Choctaw	Leflore	Prentiss	Winston
Clay	Lowndes	Quitman	Yalobusha
DeSoto	Marshall	Rankin	
Grenada	Monroe	Scott	

Once the survey area was identified, a random sample of telephone numbers of qualified respondents in North Mississippi was obtained for use in the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing or CATI system.



The Pathfinders then conducted telephone interviews with individuals throughout the North Mississippi region. Those individuals were proportionally stratified across age, household income, and zip codes. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain availability for work with a new employer; determine desired pay rates; and, collect information on such factors as age, education, commuting patterns, experience, and skills. The data obtained as a result of those interviews enabled The Pathfinders to apply and employ a proprietary methodology that accurately determined the existence of underemployment as defined in the introduction.

The Pathfinders applied a proprietary process to the analysis of the data to correct for invalid responses. For example, those persons indicating they would take a new job but also indicating the desire for increased or decreased pay that is unreasonable are not counted in the results. This process considers that to be counted as underemployed, an individual must be currently employed and willing to take another job at a pay rate commensurate with personal skills, education, and experience.

Current pay alone is not the qualifying factor for underemployment status in this study. Individuals, for example, making \$7.50 per hour, possessing no high school degree or skills, and being in the workforce for less than one year may consider themselves to be underemployed but are not considered to be so in this report. On the other hand, education, skills, and experience may qualify the person making \$22.00 per hour as truly underemployed.

Sufficient interviews were completed with qualified individuals to produce results for that entire population group which vary by no more than plus or minus 5 percentage points. If the survey were repeated 100 times, 95 times out of 100 the results would be the same as those resulting from a survey of every individual in the entire population.

Irrespective of the fact that the methodology employed is scientifically proven to produce such results, it is perhaps even more important to note that companies making location decisions based upon these surveys have reported that when staffing actually began, the numbers reported by The Pathfinders proved to be accurate.



## ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKFORCE

The North Mississippi area has a household population of approximately 1,146,500. The civilian labor force numbers approximately 544,000, and the region contains approximately 34,100 unemployed people who are actively seeking work.

The results of this assessment determined that approximately 46,000 workers can be defined as underemployed: those individuals who are currently working but would take a better job if offered by a new or existing employer and who appear to possess the skills, education, and experience to qualify them to do so. Further, the results suggest that an additional 9,000 people who are not currently employed or actively seeking work would consider re-entering the workforce. In total, the North Mississippi area has approximately 89,100 available workers for new or existing employers.

### AVAILABLE WORKERS

Number of underemployed workers	46,000
Number of unemployed persons who are actively seeking work	34,100
Number of persons who are not working, but would consider re-entering the workforce	9,000
<b>Total Number of Workers Available for Employers</b>	<b>89,100</b>

The reader is cautioned that, while the number of underemployed workers identified in the region, as well as their skills, experience, education, and costs, is accurate, all of those individuals may not be acceptable candidates for an employer. Their previous work records, stability, integrity, intelligence, appearance, and other factors are not considered in this report.



These underemployed workers might also be termed “upgraders”. They desire to move into an upgraded job and appear to possess the skills, education, and experience to enable them to do so. The pay rates they expect to achieve range from under \$8.00 to over \$25.00 per hour.

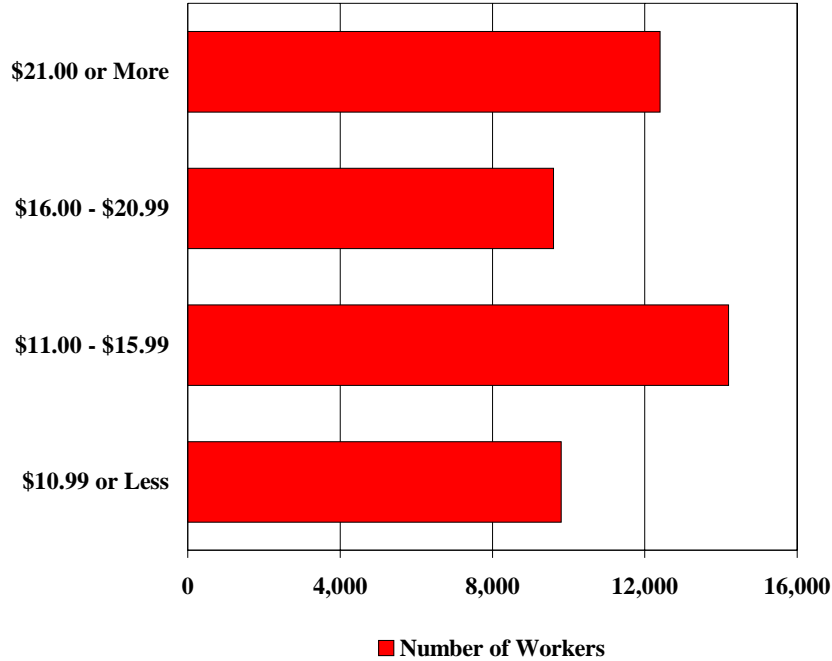
The following data represent the desired pay rates of the underemployed individuals in the survey area. Many workers expressed their wage requirements in weekly, monthly, or annual terms, but all wage figures in this report are presented in hourly rates. Selected conversions may add perspective to the hourly rates. Figures presented below are rounded and based on a 40-hour workweek.

### CONVERSION CHART

Hourly	Weekly	Monthly	Annually
\$ 8.00	\$ 320.00	\$ 1,387.00	\$ 16,640.00
\$ 10.00	\$ 400.00	\$ 1,733.00	\$ 20,800.00
\$ 12.00	\$ 480.00	\$ 2,080.00	\$ 24,960.00
\$ 14.00	\$ 560.00	\$ 2,427.00	\$ 29,120.00
\$ 16.00	\$ 640.00	\$ 2,773.00	\$ 33,280.00
\$ 18.00	\$ 720.00	\$ 3,120.00	\$ 37,440.00
\$ 20.00	\$ 800.00	\$ 3,467.00	\$ 41,600.00
\$ 22.00	\$ 880.00	\$ 3,813.00	\$ 45,760.00
\$ 24.00	\$ 960.00	\$ 4,160.00	\$ 49,920.00
\$ 26.00	\$ 1,040.00	\$ 4,507.00	\$ 54,080.00



**DESIRED WAGE RATES PER HOUR BY RANGE**  
**46,000 Underemployed Workers**



**NUMBER OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS AVAILABLE**  
**AT SPECIFIC WAGE RATES PER HOUR (rounded)**

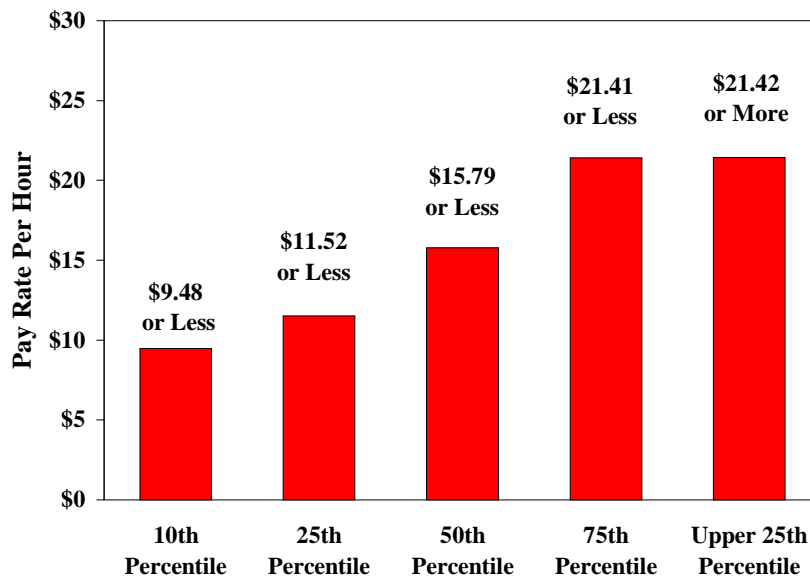
<u>\$7.99 or Less</u> <b>1,000</b>	<u>\$8.00 - \$8.99</u> <b>2,600</b>	<u>\$9.00 - \$9.99</u> <b>2,100</b>	<u>\$10.00 - \$10.99</u> <b>4,100</b>	<u>\$11.00 - \$11.99</u> <b>3,300</b>
<u>\$12.00 - \$12.99</u> <b>3,200</b>	<u>\$13.00 - \$13.99</u> <b>1,400</b>	<u>\$14.00 - \$14.99</u> <b>1,600</b>	<u>\$15.00 - \$15.99</u> <b>4,700</b>	<u>\$16.00 - \$16.99</u> <b>1,400</b>
<u>\$17.00 - \$17.99</u> <b>2,700</b>	<u>\$18.00 - \$18.99</u> <b>1,400</b>	<u>\$19.00 - \$19.99</u> <b>1,100</b>	<u>\$20.00 - \$20.99</u> <b>3,000</b>	<u>\$21.00 - \$21.99</u> <b>2,200</b>
<u>\$22.00 - \$22.99</u> <b>1,700</b>	<u>\$23.00 - \$23.99</u> <b>1,400</b>	<u>\$24.00 - \$24.99</u> <b>2,100</b>	<u>\$25.00 - \$25.99</u> <b>2,700</b>	<u>\$26.00 or More</u> <b>2,300</b>



Utilizing the desired wage information as illustrated in the preceding charts, the following conclusions can be drawn concerning the underemployed workers in the North Mississippi area:

- 10% of the underemployed workers will require \$9.48 per hour or less to change jobs.
- 25% of the underemployed workers will require \$11.52 per hour or less to change jobs.
- 50% of the underemployed workers will require \$15.79 per hour or less to change jobs.
- 75% of the underemployed workers will require \$21.41 per hour or less to change jobs.
- The upper 25% of the underemployed workers will require wages beginning at \$21.42 per hour and extending upward to over \$25.00 per hour. These are the most qualified and experienced workers.

**DESIRED WAGE RATES BY PERCENTILE**

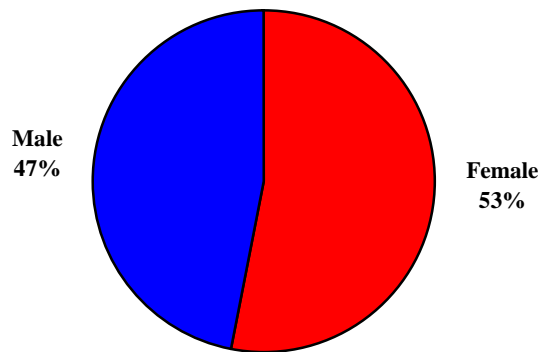


## CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS

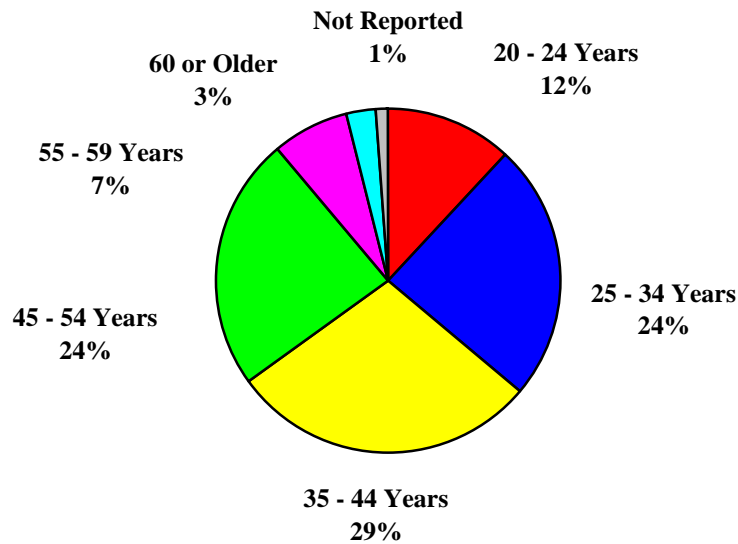
### The North Mississippi Area

The following charts provide information on various characteristics of the underemployed workers in the North Mississippi area. As these data relate solely to those individuals who are underemployed, they will vary from data representative of the population as a whole.

#### UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS - GENDER

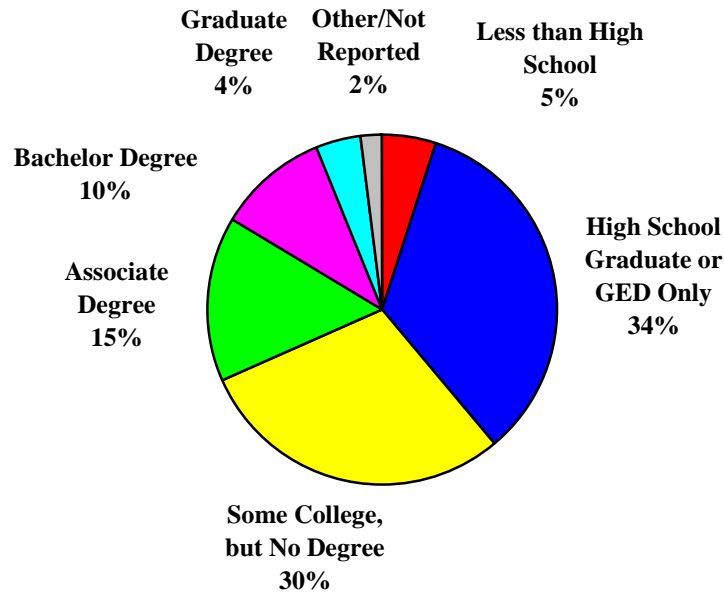


#### UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS - AGE



## CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS

### EDUCATION

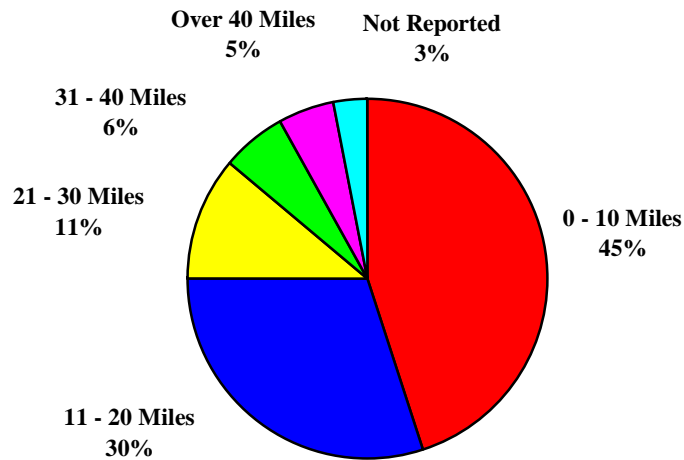


### LENGTH OF TIME IN CURRENT JOB

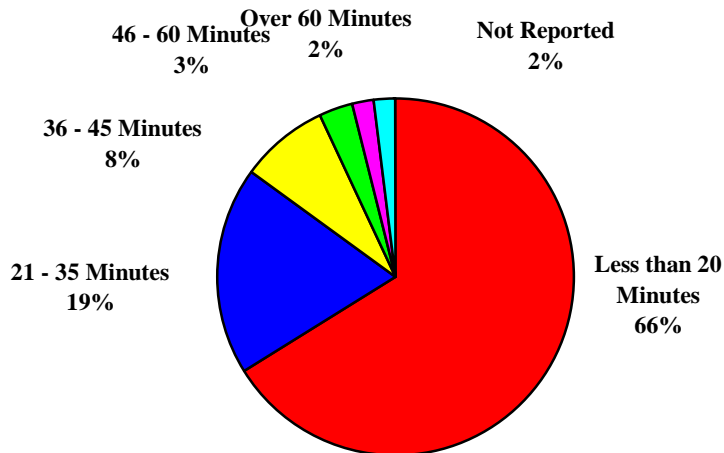


## CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS

### CURRENT COMMUTE DISTANCE



### CURRENT COMMUTE TIME



## **EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS – UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

### **The North Mississippi Area**

The experience and skills categories used in this report are designed to provide accurate workforce data for employers which fall into one or more of the following broad groups:

- manufacturing, assembly, fabrication or other industrial operations
- back office, data processing, call centers, information technology, customer service or sales operations
- distribution or transportation operations

The experience and skills categories are purposefully similar in order to present the most accurate worker availability for operations in one of those four groups.

An employee in the front office of a manufacturing operation will be considered to have “manufacturing” experience but may only have “office” skills. Someone with “manufacturing” experience may not have “manufacturing” skills, but could have “materials handling” skills if they work in shipping or receiving. “Sales and customer service” experience crosses many other experience and skills categories and ideally would be possessed by anyone with customer contact to any degree.

The similarities between the skills and experience categories are designed to ensure inclusiveness considering the multitude of tasks and job titles present in most business, government and institutional operations. Additionally, what may appear to some observers as redundancy is, in reality, a proven mechanism to cross-check the validity of responses and to identify the degree to which workplace and professional competencies are truly transferable to new positions and employers.



**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS****The North Mississippi Area****46,000 Underemployed Workers**

<b>Experience Category*</b>	<b>Total Number of Persons Experienced**</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Office Operations	23,000	50%
Warehouse/Distribution/Transportation	18,400	40%
Manufacturing/Assembly/Fabrication	20,200	44%
Maintenance/Installation/Repair	17,900	39%
Information Technology/Telecommunications	14,700	32%
Sales/Customer Service	35,900	78%

Survey results further indicate that in the warehousing and manufacturing categories, a significant number of the underemployed workers have experience relating to the furniture industry, whether it be in the areas of furniture manufacturing, delivery or sales. This type of experience can be readily transferred to other types of distribution or assembly operations.

<b>Experience Category*</b>	<b>Total Number of Persons Experienced (from table above)**</b>	<b>Number of Persons with Furniture-Related Experience</b>
Warehouse/Distribution/Transportation	18,400	8,800
Manufacturing/Assembly/Fabrication	20,200	9,700

\* Individuals polled may have experience in more than one job classification.

\*\* Rounded



**EMPLOYMENT SKILLS OF UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS****The North Mississippi Area****46,000 Underemployed Workers**

<b>Skills*</b>	<b>Total Number of Persons Skilled**</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Office Operations	23,900	52%
Warehouse/Materials Handling	22,100	48%
Manufacturing/Assembly/Fabrication	19,300	42%
Maintenance/Installation/Repair	17,000	37%
Technician/Quality Assurance	11,000	24%
Information Technology/Telecommunications	16,100	35%

Again, survey results further indicate that in the warehousing and manufacturing categories, a significant number of the underemployed workers have skills relating to the furniture industry. These skills are easily transferred to other types of distribution or assembly operations.

<b>Skills Category*</b>	<b>Total Number of Persons Skilled** (from table above)</b>	<b>Number of Persons with Furniture-Related Skills</b>
Warehouse/Materials Handling	22,100	11,700
Manufacturing/Assembly/Fabrication	19,300	8,700

\* Individuals polled may have skills in more than one job classification.

\*\* Rounded



**FACTORS AFFECTING JOB DESIRABILITY**  
**THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA**  
**46,000 UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

In an effort to identify those factors most important to the area's underemployed workers relative to consideration of an employer's desirability, the surveyed individuals were asked to rate the following job factors on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "Extremely Important" and 1 being "Not Important". The table below presents the ratings for each factor.

Factor	5 Extremely Important	4 Very Important	3 Important	2 Somewhat Important	1 Not Important
Salary	73%	19%	6%	1%	1%
Location	29%	21%	29%	13%	8%
Insurance Benefits	77%	16%	5%	1%	1%
Retirement Benefits	62%	25%	9%	2%	2%
Physical Working Environment	35%	24%	25%	8%	8%
Paid Training Programs	35%	21%	20%	8%	16%
Opportunity for Advancement	47%	24%	20%	4%	5%
Financial Stability of the Company	57%	14%	13%	10%	6%



In the table below, the factors are presented in order by “Extremely Important”. Bear in mind that the scores should be viewed in relation to each other. In other words, respondents ranked opportunity for advancement as more “Extremely Important” as a job factor than physical working environment, although such a ranking does not mean that workers in the North Mississippi area consider physical working environment to be unimportant in their evaluation of new job opportunities.

Factor	Extremely Important
Insurance Benefits	77%
Salary	73%
Retirement Benefits	62%
Financial Stability of the Company	57%
Opportunity for Advancement	47%
Physical Working Environment	35%
Paid Training Programs	35%
Location	29%

As indicated, in North Mississippi, the factor of insurance benefits is regarded by the underemployed workers as most important when considering a job change.



**INTEREST IN TRAINING COURSES  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA  
46,000 UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

A component was added to this survey which was designed to gauge possible interest in training courses on the part of the 46,000 underemployed workers in the North Mississippi workforce. The primary purpose of including this component was to produce data which would provide guidance in the establishment of training programs which will more precisely meet the needs of the public and the business community in the North Mississippi area.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in upgrading their skills by enrolling in an area training program. As indicated below, approximately 80% of the underemployed workers in North Mississippi rank “Somewhat” to “Extremely” interested in enrolling, with 64% reporting “Very” to “Extremely” interested. 20% expressed no interest.

<b>Level of Interest in Enrolling in Area Training Programs</b>	<b>Number of Persons*</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Extremely Interested	19,800	43%
Very Interested	9,700	21%
Interested	5,500	12%
Somewhat Interested	1,800	4%
Not Interested	9,200	20%

\* **Rounded**



Factors influencing the underemployed workers' decisions to enroll in area training programs include cost, length of course, and, among others, scheduling. The chart which follows illustrates these factors and their impact on the underemployed's decision.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Location of Class	55%
Guaranteed Job after Completion	44%
Timing – Evenings/Weekends	40%
Cost	38%
Timing – Days	23%
Length of Course	18%
Supportive Current Employer	8%
On-Site Child Care	6%

As noted, location of class appears to be the most dominant influence on whether or not to enroll in a training program.

Further, survey respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of their enrolling in training programs relating to six different areas of business industrial clusters. The surveyed individuals were asked to rate their likelihood of enrolling on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "Extremely Likely to Enroll" and 1 being "Not Likely to Enroll". In the table that follows, it should be noted that many of the respondents indicated interest in more than one program; therefore, the percent total will not equal 100.



**INTEREST IN TRAINING COURSES  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA  
46,000 UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

<b>Training Course</b>	<b>5 Extremely Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>4 Very Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>3 Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>2 Somewhat Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>1 Not Likely to Enroll</b>
Industrial Machine Operations	23%	16%	21%	10%	30%
Industrial Maintenance	18%	14%	19%	12%	37%
Welding or Machining	18%	10%	15%	12%	45%
Technical Trades	19%	16%	23%	12%	30%
Computer Programming/ Software Development	37%	22%	19%	8%	14%
Computer Maintenance/ Installation or Repair	25%	13%	23%	14%	25%

In the first table on the following page, the courses are presented in order by “Somewhat to Extremely Likely to Enroll”. Bear in mind that the scores should be viewed in relation to each other. In other words, respondents ranked computer maintenance/installation/repair programs as more “Somewhat to Extremely Likely” to be enrollment choices than courses in welding or machining, although such a ranking does not necessarily mean that underemployed workers in the North Mississippi area consider welding or machining programs to be unattractive. As indicated, in North Mississippi, computer programming/software development programs appear to be regarded by the underemployed workers as the training courses with the most appeal.



<b>Training Course</b>	<b>Somewhat to Extremely Likely to Enroll</b>
Computer Programming / Software Development	86%
Computer Maintenance / Installation or Repair	75%
Industrial Machine Operations	70%
Technical Trades	70%
Industrial Maintenance	63%
Welding or Machining	55%

On the low end of the ratings, the following chart illustrates the training courses in order by “Not Likely to Enroll”.

<b>Training Course</b>	<b>Not Likely to Enroll</b>
Welding or Machining	45%
Industrial Maintenance	37%
Industrial Machine Operations	30%
Technical Trades	30%
Computer Maintenance / Installation or Repair	25%
Computer Programming / Software Development	14%



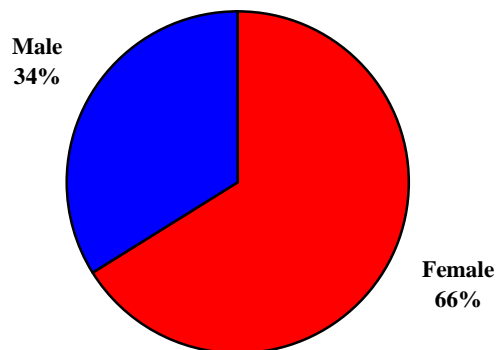
## UNEMPLOYED WORKERS

### The North Mississippi Area

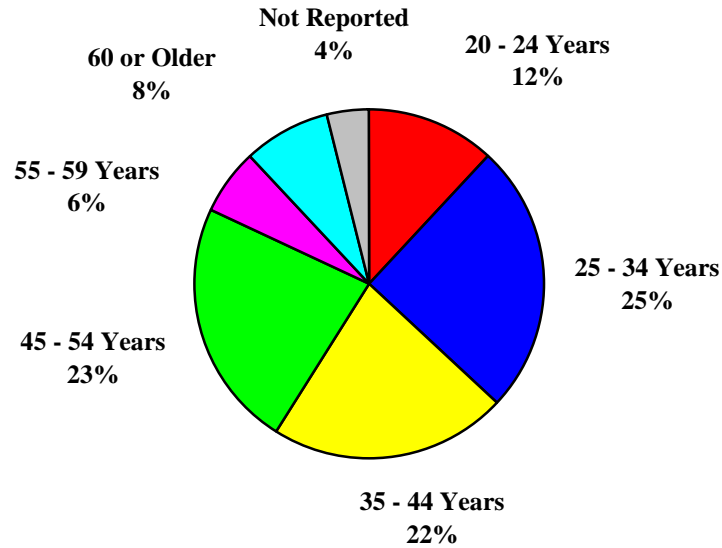
Published statistics document 34,100 unemployed workers in North Mississippi who are actively seeking work and who would, therefore, be considered potential workers for a new or expanding business.

The results of this workforce assessment suggest that an additional 9,000 people, who are currently not employed or actively seeking work, would consider re-entering the workforce. These individuals are referred to as the “re-enters”. About 66% of these additional individuals are female, and the group is one year older on average than the underemployed. The education of the re-enters roughly mirrors that of the underemployed members of the workforce, albeit with a somewhat higher concentration of “High School Graduate or GED Only”. The wages required by this group to enter or re-enter the workforce fall across a broad spectrum of pay rates, with \$10.72 per hour as the median.

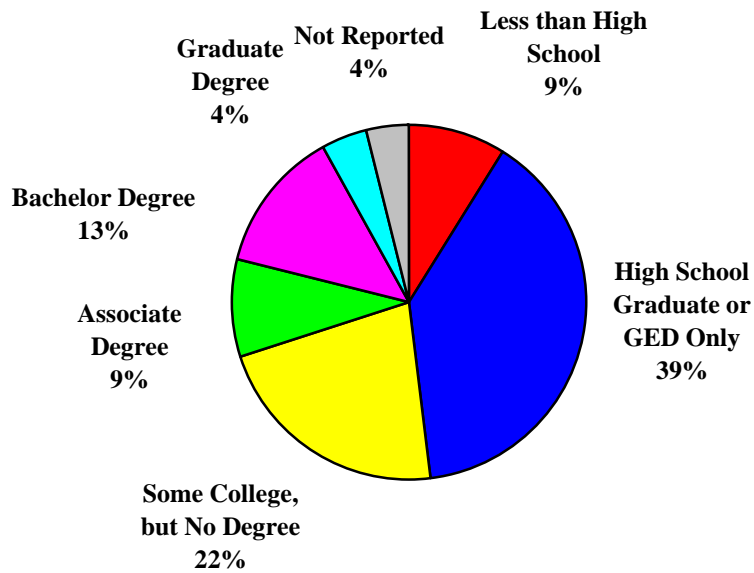
### RE-ENTERS – GENDER



### RE-ENTERS - AGE



### RE-ENTERS - EDUCATION



Further, this group of potential available workers exhibits skills and experience in the areas of office operations and sales/customer service. In addition, some furniture-related skills and experience exist within the re-enters, not at the levels of the underemployed, but enough to merit attention, as these individuals may, in fact, become a source of employees for future operations.

With regard to desirability factors of a potential employer, the re-enters rate insurance benefits as being the most important factor to them when considering entering the workforce. In terms of training, 43% of re-enters, or approximately 3,900 individuals, are “Very” to “Extremely” interested in enrolling in area training programs, with location of class, followed by cost, being the dominant factors influencing their decision to enroll. The likelihood of the re-enters enrolling in identified area training courses is shown below.

<b>Training Course</b>	<b>5 Extremely Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>4 Very Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>3 Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>2 Somewhat Likely to Enroll</b>	<b>1 Not Likely to Enroll</b>
Industrial Machine Operations	21%	13%	16%	12%	38%
Industrial Maintenance	16%	13%	22%	7%	42%
Welding or Machining	20%	6%	13%	8%	53%
Technical Trades	20%	14%	13%	14%	39%
Computer Programming/ Software Development	31%	15%	23%	11%	20%
Computer Maintenance/ Installation or Repair	15%	13%	25%	14%	33%

The determinations for this segment of the workforce have a larger statistical variance than that for the underemployed.



## EMPLOYERS' VIEWS OF THE THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE

In developing a profile of existing workers in the North Mississippi region, The Pathfinders considered such factors as labor availability, productivity, unionization, attitudes, costs, and education. The analysis was based upon interviews conducted with senior management and human resources professionals from companies located in the region. Each of these companies operated in the industrial, commercial, or service sectors. The interview sampling was sufficiently large to make valid workforce judgments.

As determined from the employer interviews, the table below reflects various methods used to recruit workers in the North Mississippi region and the percent of employers utilizing that method. Many use more than one method; therefore, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Recruiting Method	% of Employers
Newspaper Ads	57%
State Agency	43%
Word of Mouth	40%
Referrals	37%
Internet	13%
Staffing Service	13%
Walk-Ins	10%
Radio/TV	7%

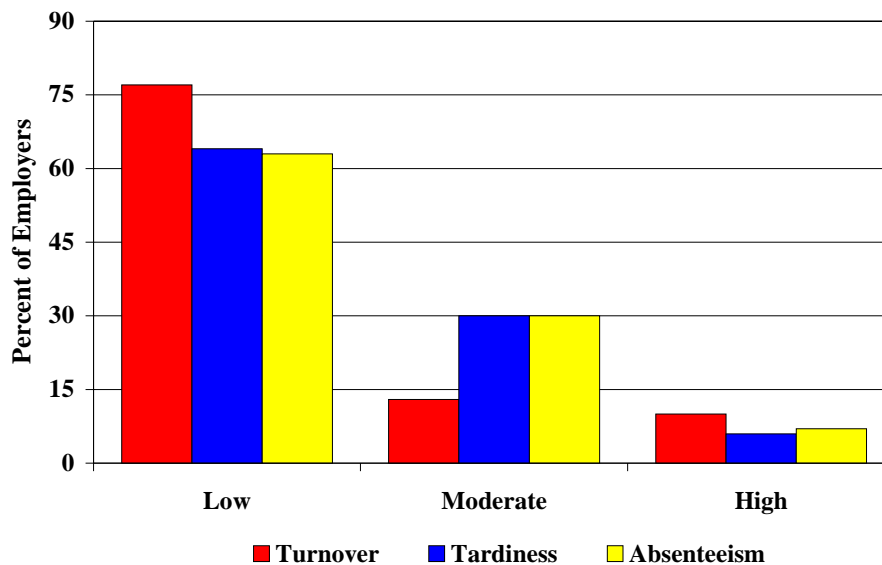
Other methods of recruiting, each with less than 7% representation, include recruiters, colleges and professional publications.



Employers with operations in other regions of the United States were asked to compare their experiences in those other areas with their experiences in the North Mississippi region. Of those employers who had operations elsewhere, 89% stated that their North Mississippi area operations were comparable to or better than the operations in other locations in terms of profitability and production. This is indicative not only of good management but also of a productive workforce.

Based upon the experience of The Pathfinders in evaluating labor forces in numerous locations, a definite correlation between productivity, absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, and substance abuse appears to exist. That correlation goes beyond the fact that an absent worker is obviously unproductive. Rather, those factors are indicative of an employee’s attitude toward the job. The chart below shows the percent of employers rating for turnover, tardiness and absenteeism in the North Mississippi region.

**PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS RATING  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE**



Additionally, in the North Mississippi region, all of the employers interviewed stated their companies tested for substance abuse, primarily pre-employment and post-accident. Substance abuse within the individual companies’ workforces was reported as very low.



In consideration of all factors, 90% of the employers in the North Mississippi area rated the productivity of the workforce as “Good” to “Excellent”. Worker reliability received high marks from 87% of the employers.

**PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS RATING  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Worker Productivity	20%	70%	10%	0%
Worker Reliability	30%	57%	13%	0%
Worker Attitudes	27%	60%	13%	0%

The educational competencies of employees are additional factors used to evaluate an area’s labor force. In the North Mississippi area, 60% of the employers interviewed rated the local public schools as “Excellent” or “Good”, and 100% of the employers rated the local community colleges and technical schools as “Excellent” or “Good”. Employers gave the following ratings to their employees relative to competency in reading, writing, and calculations.

**PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS RATING  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Reading Competency	0%	69%	31%	0%
Writing Competency	0%	59%	41%	0%
Calculations Competency	4%	46%	46%	4%

A common employer complaint relates to the shortage of skilled and technical workers. The availability of these workers in the North Mississippi region must be viewed from the perspective of comparative availability when other areas of the state and nation are



considered. Skilled and technical workers are in great demand and difficult to find in the vast majority of locations. Of the companies interviewed, 50% considered skilled worker availability to be “Excellent” or “Good”, while 33% considered it to be “Fair”. The availability of technical workers was rated “Excellent” or “Good” by 27% of the interviewed companies and “Fair” by 40%.

The following table provides a composite portrait of employers’ experiences with and opinions of workers in the North Mississippi region. Taken in context with the data gathered and presented in the workforce survey, a balanced profile of the attributes of individuals available to fill the labor needs of new and expanding firms is provided.

**PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS RATING  
THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Availability of Skilled Workers	7%	43%	33%	17%
Availability of Unskilled Workers	33%	60%	7%	0%
Availability of Professional Workers	10%	23%	40%	27%
Availability of Technical Workers	7%	20%	40%	33%
Worker Productivity	20%	70%	10%	0%
Worker Reliability	30%	57%	13%	0%
Worker Attitudes	27%	60%	13%	0%
Reading Competency	0%	69%	31%	0%
Writing Competency	0%	59%	41%	0%
Calculations Competency	4%	46%	46%	4%
Teamwork Skills	14%	80%	3%	3%
Entry Level Skills	7%	52%	41%	0%



**COMPARISONS OF EMPLOYERS RATINGS**  
**TOTAL WORKFORCE**  
**The North Mississippi Area /**  
**Locations Previously Surveyed**

In the course of workforce surveys, local employers are asked to rate their workers on a number of factors. Those factors include: worker productivity; worker reliability and attitudes; reading/writing/calculations competency; teamwork skills; entry level skills; availability of skilled workers; availability of unskilled workers; availability of technical workers; and, availability of professional workers. Local employers are asked to rate each factor either “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair”, or “Poor”.

The purpose of these interviews and ratings is not only to determine how local employers rate their workers but also to provide a means for comparing local ratings to those of all locations surveyed during the past eighteen months. Such comparison will enable you to assess your employers’ ratings of their workers in contrast to the body of thousands of employer ratings recorded in that period.

The following charts present the comparative results for each factor. They compare the percentages of the North Mississippi area employers who rated their workers “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair”, or “Poor” on each factor with the “Highest” rating of that factor in all areas surveyed in the last eighteen months and the “Median” rating for that factor in all areas surveyed during that time. As a result, the “Highest” and “Median” ratings do not add to 100%.

For example, 20% of the North Mississippi area employers rated “Worker Productivity” as “Excellent”. Of all the locations surveyed during the last eighteen months, the “Median” for that rating is 21%, and the “Highest” rating recorded in the “Excellent” category is 46%. The same comparison applies for each of the other factors. In these charts, the North Mississippi area is shown as “N. Mississippi”.



**WORKER PRODUCTIVITY**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	46%	Highest	76%	Highest	33%	Highest	11%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	21%	Median	57%	Median	16%	Median	3%

**WORKER RELIABILITY**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	43%	Highest	76%	Highest	44%	Highest	14%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	15%	Median	52%	Median	21%	Median	6%

**WORKER ATTITUDES**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	30%	Highest	77%	Highest	40%	Highest	19%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	14%	Median	61%	Median	20%	Median	4%

**WORKER READING COMPETENCY**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	24%	Highest	76%	Highest	55%	Highest	27%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	8%	Median	50%	Median	37%	Median	7%



**WORKER WRITING COMPETENCY**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	16%	Highest	74%	Highest	60%	Highest	30%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	6%	Median	52%	Median	34%	Median	8%

**WORKER CALCULATIONS COMPETENCY**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	24%	Highest	69%	Highest	62%	Highest	43%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>4%</b>
Median	7%	Median	43%	Median	42%	Median	14%

**WORKER TEAMWORK SKILLS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	36%	Highest	86%	Highest	33%	Highest	7%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>3%</b>
Median	11%	Median	64%	Median	20%	Median	5%

**WORKER ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	18%	Highest	80%	Highest	57%	Highest	31%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	5%	Median	51%	Median	34%	Median	9%



**AVAILABILITY OF SKILLED WORKERS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	24%	Highest	60%	Highest	71%	Highest	47%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>17%</b>
Median	6%	Median	36%	Median	41%	Median	18%

**AVAILABILITY OF UNSKILLED WORKERS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	53%	Highest	75%	Highest	50%	Highest	17%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>0%</b>
Median	27%	Median	49%	Median	20%	Median	5%

**AVAILABILITY OF PROFESSIONAL WORKERS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	19%	Highest	64%	Highest	63%	Highest	54%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>27%</b>
Median	6%	Median	33%	Median	38%	Median	23%

**AVAILABILITY OF TECHNICAL WORKERS**

Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
Highest	18%	Highest	58%	Highest	60%	Highest	54%
<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>N. Mississippi</b>	<b>33%</b>
Median	4%	Median	34%	Median	42%	Median	20%



## NATIONAL COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS

As a matter of course in site-selection projects, The Pathfinders evaluates published government workforce statistics. Those statistics, however, depict the entire workforce while only a minority segment of those workers will be considered for or have an interest in new jobs with a company. The characteristics of the select, underemployed workforce group represented in this report may vary significantly from the workforce as a whole as reported in published government data.

Accordingly, the information presented in the workforce report for the North Mississippi region covers those members of the workforce who are, by virtue of their underemployment, potential candidates for new jobs. Existing employers, or new employers recruited to the North Mississippi region, typically will not depend heavily on the unemployed to staff a new operation or to fill vacancies in existing operations caused by turnover or expansions. Companies look to the ranks of people who are already employed but are seeking to better themselves. Those individuals in that category who appear to possess the education, skills, and experience to merit a better job are classified as underemployed.

The workforce report issued by The Pathfinders documents the availability of underemployed workers as well as the skills, experience, education, and costs of individuals in that hidden workforce in the North Mississippi region. This section of the report provides a comparison of the characteristics of the underemployed workforce in the North Mississippi region with the underemployed workforces in other communities previously surveyed throughout the nation. A prospect company considering the North Mississippi region as a location will judge its workforce on a comparative basis. This section of the report will allow local economic development professionals to view the area's workforce in relation to others across the country. The comparative data for other locations used in the following charts and tables reflect information accumulated over the past eighteen months. The Pathfinders maintains a continuing database of over 600 surveyed counties and communities and more than 30 million workers.



## Locations Used In Comparative Analysis

In the various charts which follow this page, North Mississippi is compared with others for the purpose of making the data meaningful. In the charts, figures for North Mississippi are shown alongside the “lowest”, “median” and “highest” figures from other workforce surveys conducted by The Pathfinders. The comparisons are with communities and counties representing both larger and smaller and those similar in size. They are also scattered throughout the nation, and a partial listing of locations from which the “low”, “median” and “high” data reported are derived includes:

Albany, NY	Cullman County, AL	Lake Havasu, AZ	Rutherford County, TN
Albuquerque, NM	Culpeper County, VA	Laramie, WY	Salem, IL
Allegany County, MD	Danville, IL	LaSalle, IL	San Marcus, TX
Amarillo, TX	Daytona Beach, FL	Lea County, NM	Scranton, PA
Anderson, IN	Decatur, AL	Lebanon, KY	Sequin, TX
Ardmore, OK	Eastern Shore, MD	Lee’s Summit, MO	Seneca County, NY
Ashland, KY	Elizabethtown, KY	Lexington, KY	Shasta County, CA
Atascadero, CA	Evansville, IN	Long Island, NY	Shelby County, AL
Atlanta, GA	Fairfield County, OH	Longview, TX	Shreveport, LA
Auburn, AL	Fargo, ND	Louisville, KY	Sikeston, MO
Baldwin County, AL	Fauquier County, VA	Madison, SD	Silver City, NM
Bay County, FL	Fulton County, KY	McDowell County, NC	Spartanburg, SC
Bedford, TX	Grant County, NM	Moberly, MO	Spokane, WA
Beeville, TX	Grant County, WA	Mobile, AL	Springfield, IL
Binghamton, NY	Grays Harbor, WA	Mohawk Valley, NY	Sullivan County, NY
Birmingham, AL	Greene County, NY	Monroe County, NY	Sumter County, SC
Boone County, IN	Grenada, MS	Montgomery, AL	Syracuse, NY
Bowie, TX	Harrison County, IN	Moorhead, MN	Tallahassee, FL
Bryan/College Station, TX	Hazleton, PA	Muncie, IN	Taylor, TX
Buffalo, NY	Henderson, KY	New Braunfels, TX	Terre Haute, IN
Bullitt County, KY	Hendricks County, IN	New York City, NY	Tioga County, NY
Cambridge, MD	Hernando County, FL	Obion County, TN	Tipton County, IN
Campbellsville, KY	Hillsdale County, MI	Ontario County, NY	Tomball, TX
Cape Girardeau, MO	Hudson Valley, NY	Oswego County, NY	Tupelo, MS
Casper, WY	Huntsville, AL	Owsley County, KY	Tuscaloosa, AL
Centralia, IL	Hurst, TX	Pampa, TX	Ulster County, NY
Champaign County, IL	Hutto, TX	Panama City, FL	Vermillion County, IN
Chattanooga, TN	Independence, MO	Pensacola, FL	Vineland, NJ
Cheyenne, WY	Indianapolis, IN	Polk County, NC	Warren County, VA
Cleveland County, NC	Jackson, MS	Ponca City, OK	Watertown, SD
Clinton, SC	Jackson County, MO	Prescott Valley, AZ	Wilkes-Barre, PA
Conroe, TX	Jay County, IN	Reno, NV	Williamsport, PA
Corpus Christi, TX	Kalamazoo, MI	Rutherford County, NC	Yankton, SD



The workforce report documented the number of underemployed workers in North Mississippi who would be available for an employer at various pay rates ranging from \$8.00 per hour or below to \$30.00 per hour or above and who appear to have the skills, experience, and education to justify the desired pay rates. The table below shows that 25% (lower quartile) of the underemployed workers would take a new job for \$11.52 per hour or less. In locations surveyed over the past eighteen months, the lowest desired pay rate in the lower quartile of underemployed workers was \$8.98 per hour or less, the median \$11.43 or less, and the highest desired pay rate was \$18.73 per hour or less.

**DESIRED WAGES (per hour) – LOWER QUARTILE  
UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

Desired Wage North Mississippi	Lowest Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months	Median Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months	Highest Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months
\$11.52 or Less	\$8.98 or Less	\$11.43 or Less	\$18.73 or Less

Those underemployed workers in the upper quartile have more education, better skills, and greater experience. Yet based on current pay rates, they are considered to be underemployed. In North Mississippi, the underemployed individuals in the upper 25% desire \$21.42 per hour or more. In locations surveyed over the past eighteen months, the lowest desired pay rate in the upper quartile of underemployed workers was \$15.87 or more, the median \$21.36 or more, and the highest was \$39.06 per hour or more.

**DESIRED WAGES (per hour) – UPPER QUARTILE  
UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

Desired Wage North Mississippi	Lowest Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months	Median Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months	Highest Desired Wage Locations Surveyed Past 18 Months
\$21.42 or More	\$15.87 or More	\$21.36 or More	\$39.06 or More



The following charts compare the percentages of underemployed workers in the North Mississippi region who have experience in various fields of employment with the percentages of underemployed workers in locations surveyed over the past eighteen months who have the same type of experience.

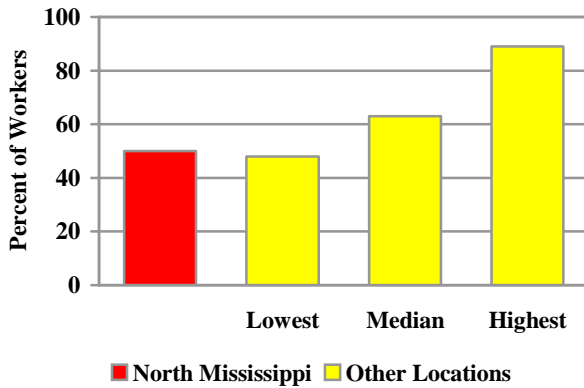
The experience charts are followed by skills charts, which compare the percentages of underemployed workers in the North Mississippi region who possess various types of employment skills with the percentages of underemployed workers in locations surveyed over the past eighteen months who possess the same skills.



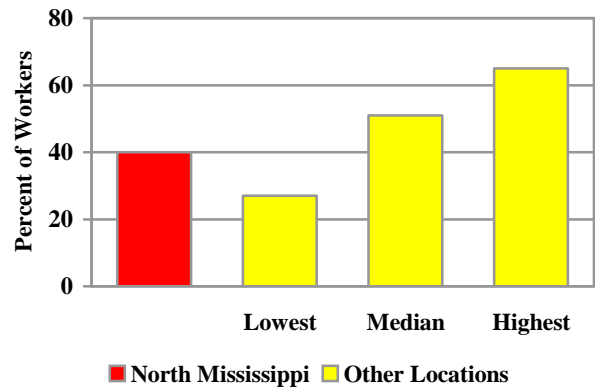
**COMPARISON OF EXPERIENCE  
UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

**The North Mississippi Area /  
Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months**

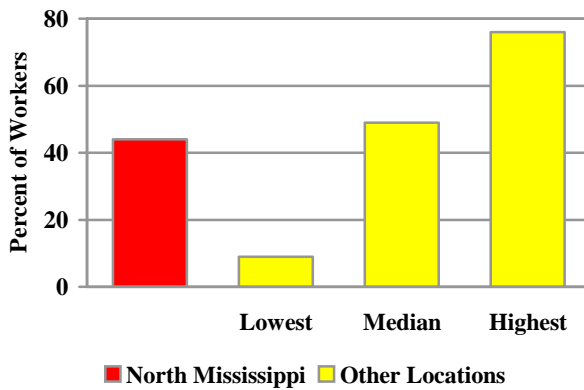
**OFFICE OPERATIONS**



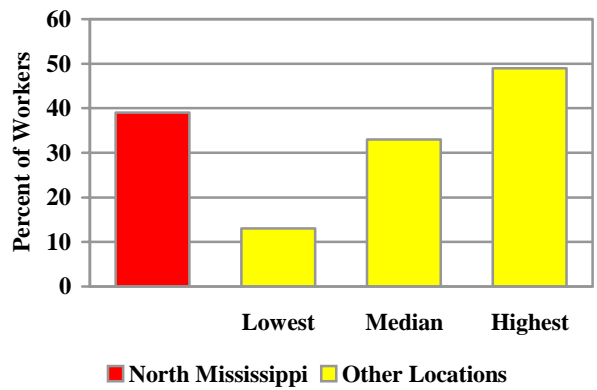
**WAREHOUSE / DISTRIBUTION /  
TRANSPORTATION**



**MANUFACTURING / ASSEMBLY /  
FABRICATION**

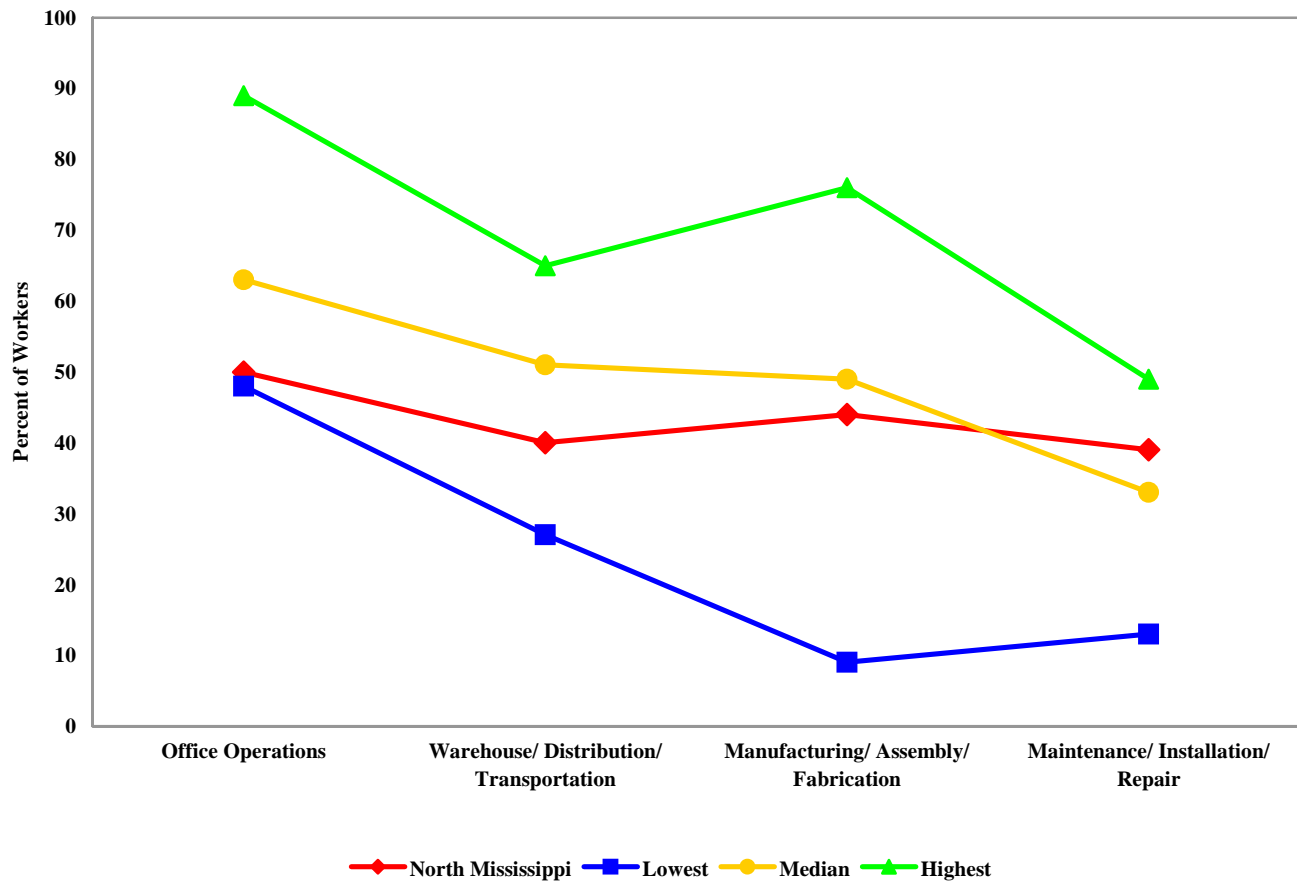


**MAINTENANCE /  
INSTALLATION / REPAIR**



**SUMMARY COMPARISON OF EXPERIENCE  
UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS**

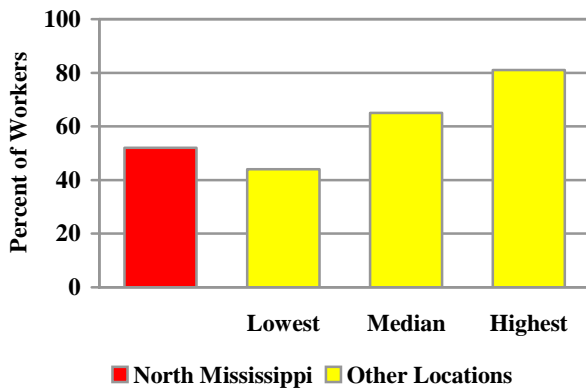
**The North Mississippi Area /  
Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months**



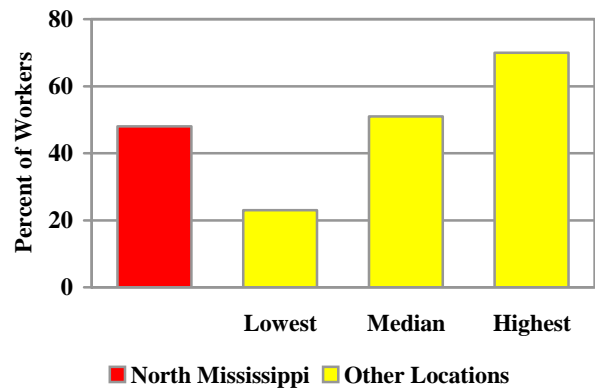
## COMPARISON OF SKILLS UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS

The North Mississippi Area /  
Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

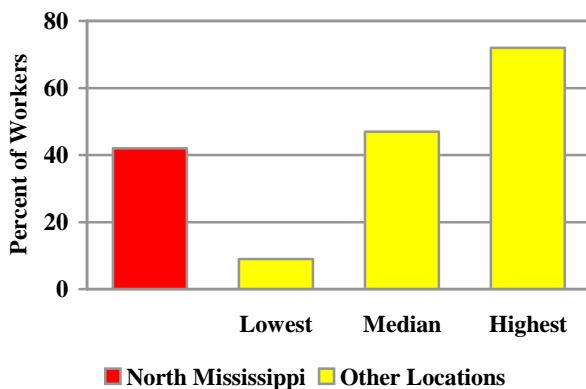
**OFFICE OPERATIONS**



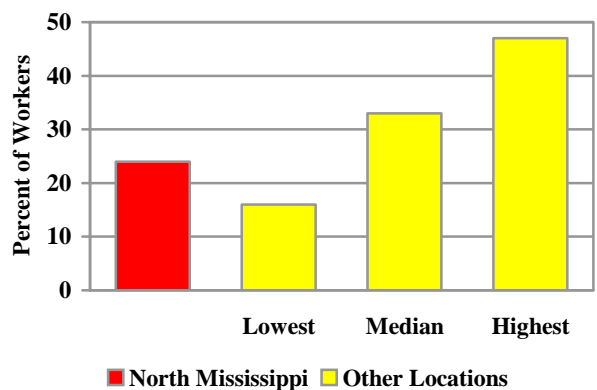
**WAREHOUSE / MATERIALS HANDLING**



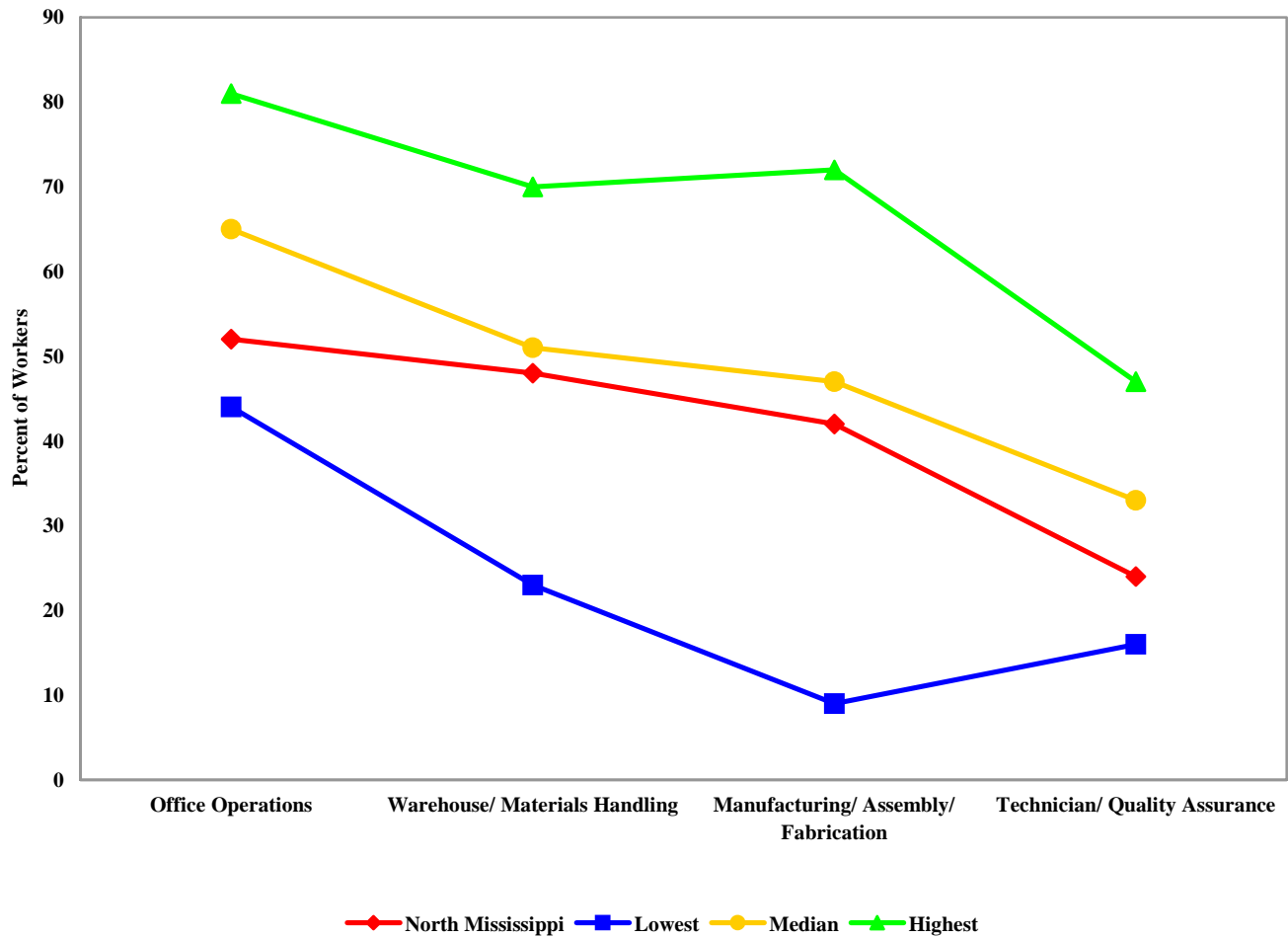
**MANUFACTURING / ASSEMBLY / FABRICATION**



**TECHNICIAN / QUALITY ASSURANCE**



**SUMMARY COMPARISON OF SKILLS  
UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS  
The North Mississippi Area /  
Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months**



## CLOSING REMARKS

The foregoing report represents an assessment of the underemployment that exists in the North Mississippi region. It includes a set of important interlocking measurements of the number of underemployed workers, their cost, skills, experience, education, reliability, productivity, and other related factors. The information allows the economic development professional and the site-selection team to view the area in comparison to other locations.

Attention should be given to the “Employers’ Views of the North Mississippi Area Total Workforce” section of this report in which local employers’ views of the characteristics of local workers are compared with employers’ views in other locations where the identical questions have been asked in identical fashion.

Similarly, attention should be given to the final section of this report, “National Comparative Observations”, which compares, employing an identical methodology, the costs, experience, and skills of local underemployed workers with those underemployed workers in locations surveyed by The Pathfinders over the past eighteen months.

While the number of underemployed workers in the North Mississippi region, including their cost, skills, and experience, is the focus of this report, the data should be interpreted in a comparative perspective just as the corporate site selector will in deciding among competing locations.

### **For Informational Purposes:**

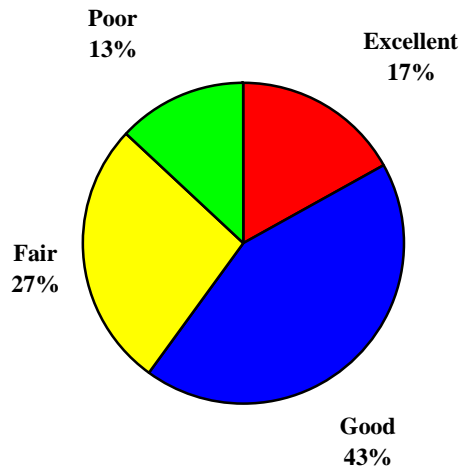
<b>The North Mississippi Area Civilian Workforce .....</b>	<b>544,000</b>
<b>Largest Workforce Surveyed by The Pathfinders .....</b>	<b>3,452,000</b>
<b>Median Workforce Surveyed by The Pathfinders .....</b>	<b>138,400</b>
<b>Smallest Workforce Surveyed by The Pathfinders.....</b>	<b>3,350</b>
<b>Number of Locations Surveyed by The Pathfinders.....</b>	<b>311</b>



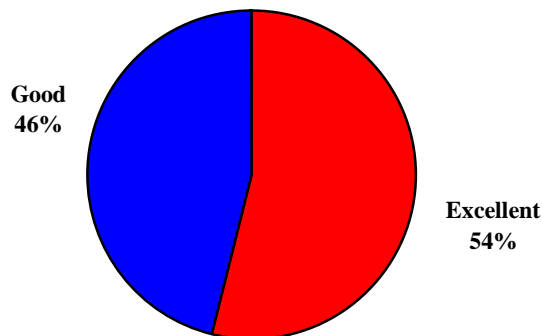
## EMPLOYER OPINIONS ON EDUCATION / SKILLS / TRAINING THE NORTH MISSISSIPPI AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE

As an element of this project, employers in the North Mississippi region were interviewed concerning their opinions of local educational institutions, as well as their opinions on skills and training issues. As previously stated in this report, 60% of the employers interviewed rated the local public schools as “Excellent” or “Good”, and 100% of the employers rated the local community colleges and technical schools as “Excellent” or “Good”.

### LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

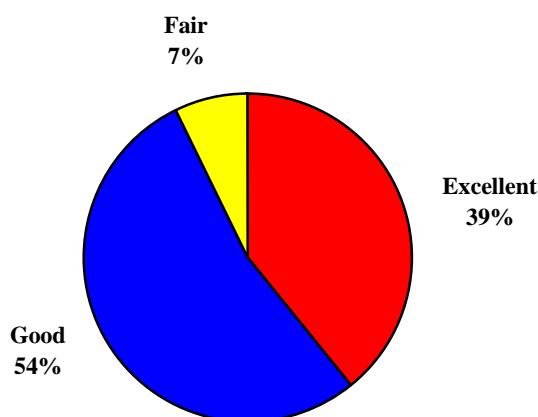


### COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



In addition, employers were asked to rate the skills of those graduating from area community colleges and universities. This produced an extremely positive score.

## SKILLS RATINGS COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES GRADUATES



Even though the ratings were favorable, employers did report some gaps they felt existed in available offerings. At the public school level, the need for more vocational technical classes was expressed by many of the employers, as were classes devoted to basic job-related skills such as self-discipline, attendance and work ethic and general education. At the community college and university level, again the need for more technical training courses, including apprenticeship programs, was cited. Specifically mentioned were maintenance, computer, drawing and chemical operator curriculum.

Area training programs in addition to local public schools, community colleges and universities, for example, private schools, were reported by several of the employers interviewed. These other programs were overall rated as "Good"; however, the need was expressed for more technical training and real-time knowledge of the workplace in these offerings.

In terms of those skills most difficult to find in the North Mississippi area, technical skills relating to maintenance, electronics, mechanics, and process control were reported by almost 75% of the interviewed employers as being the most difficult to find. Other areas of difficulty included professionals such as engineers and management. Also, those employers with openings for individuals with trade skills, including electricians and welders, appear to have some difficulty when trying to fill those positions.

The question was posed to the employers as to what, in their opinions, was the greatest workforce need in the North Mississippi area. Work ethics, including such elements as discipline, initiative and life skills, was cited as the number one issue, following closely by technical skills. Short-term workforce issues included filling skilled and professional positions, as indicated above in the paragraph concerning those skills most difficult to find, and better training. Other factors relating to the short-term included health care costs, housing, and computer skills. With regard to long-term issues concerning the area workforce, the employers reported the need for more emphasis on the value and quality of education, helping to reduce the drop-out rate among high school students, and vocational training, both of which are contributing factors to a needed increase in high school graduates and skilled workers in the region.

Furthermore, the employers interviewed pointed to trends emerging in the business climate that include global competition for workers and wages; increased technology, creating a need for highly skilled, specialized technical and professional workers; and, production incentives.

On an individual company level, the employers interviewed for this project were questioned as to the highest priorities for training upgrades for their current workers. As can be seen in the following chart, technical skills, followed by work habits/ethics rated as highest priorities for training upgrades for these employers' workers.

<b>Training Upgrades</b>	<b>% of Employers</b>
Technical Skills	62%
Work Ethics/Habits	45%
Communications/Soft Skills	35%
Basic Skills (Reading/Writing/Math)	28%
Management	14%
Customer Service	7%

As a follow-up, the employers interviewed were questioned as to possible ways to improve the quality of the workforce. Improved education and additional training facilities and programs were mentioned most frequently by the employers. Closely aligned with this was increased interaction and cooperation between the educational centers and the area industries in terms of what skills are needed and at what level. Also, several employers suggested locating more industry into the area with the idea that the industries would perhaps provide on-site training. A specific suggestion was made to use community development funds to develop a strategy on how to meet the area's needs.

All the above-mentioned information may be summarized by stating that the need for competent, trained and skilled labor is present today in the companies currently operating in the North Mississippi area. Programs and plans should be formulated and put into place to address the needs and concerns of the area's current as well as future employers. In an ever-changing and evolving workplace, up-to-date technology, rock solid job skills and strong work ethics are crucial to building and maintaining a well-equipped workforce.



## EDUCATION SUMMARY

Three public universities, two private colleges, and seven community colleges are located in the North Mississippi area. The three public universities are the University of Mississippi, or “Ole Miss”, located in Oxford; Mississippi State University (MSU) located in Starkville; and, Mississippi University for Women (MUW) located in Columbus. These universities offer high quality education in a wide array of disciplines, including pharmacy, engineering, veterinary medicine, and nursing, along with many others such as arts & sciences, business, and education. Enrollment figures for the 2006-2007 school year for these institutions, acquired from the university registrar offices and institutional research departments, are as follows:

<b>Institution</b>	<b>2006-2007 Enrollment Freshman Class</b>	<b>2006-2007 Enrollment Sophomore Class</b>	<b>2006-2007 Enrollment Junior Class</b>	<b>2006-2007 Enrollment Senior Class</b>	<b>2006-2007 Enrollment Graduate School</b>	<b>Total 2006- 2007 Enrollment</b>
Ole Miss	3,495	2,374	2,415	3,449	1,588	14,016
MSU	2,844	2,344	2,735	4,707	3,576	16,206
MUW	606	356	483	835	148	2,428

The following table denotes the 2006-2007 enrollments at the three public universities by department or college.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Arts &amp; Sciences</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Engineering</b>	<b>Nursing</b>	<b>Other/ Undeclared</b>
Ole Miss	6,634	3,352	712	646	n/a	1,084
MSU	3,742	2,563	3,292	2,343	n/a	4,266
MUW	492	205	629	n/a	575	527



Due to audited classes and additional departments and degrees, the figures reflected above may not equal the total 2006-2007 enrollment. For example, the University of Mississippi has a substantial law school that enrolled 508 students in the 2006-2007 school year, but this university-specific program is not reflected in the table above. Nonetheless, approximately 33,000 students were enrolled in these three universities for the 2006-2007 year. Please note that 2007-2008 enrollment figures were not yet available at the time of this report's production. Additionally, in 2006, 3,102 degrees were conferred at Ole Miss; 3,711 degrees conferred at Mississippi State University; and, 481 at the Mississippi University for Women.

The two private colleges in the North Mississippi area are Rust College in Holly Springs and Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain. Rust College, a black, co-educational, senior liberal arts college, had a total enrollment of 920 in Fall 2006. Blue Mountain College, a denominational, faith-centered institution, enrolled 366 students in Fall 2006.

The seven community colleges serving the North Mississippi area are East Central, East Mississippi, Hinds, Holmes, Itawamba, Northeast Mississippi, and Northwest Mississippi. Approximate total enrollment figures were obtained from research departments and registrar offices at the individual community colleges.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Approximate Current Enrollment</b>
East Central Community College	2,739
East Mississippi Community College	4,167
Hinds Community College	18,040
Holmes Community College	4,896
Itawamba Community College	8,271
Northeast Mississippi Community College	3,277
Northwest Mississippi Community College	6,825



The community colleges have many programs relevant to the training needs of local employers. For example, East Central Community College offers training programs in automotive mechanic technology, machine shop technology, industrial maintenance, electrical, and computer technology. Hinds Community College offers training in automotive mechanic, building trades, metal trades, and technology applications. Hinds also provides an Automotive and Trucking career program with training available in automotive machining, diesel equipment, and others. Northeast Community College, Northwest Community College, East Mississippi Community College, Itawamba Community College, and Holmes Community College also offer similar programs.

During the course of this survey, many employers mentioned the dropout rate in local public schools as a challenge facing the area workforce. Current and past school enrollment were analyzed to determine the current number of students at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level and potential graduates, as well as to project the number of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students for the next six years. Enrollment trends suggested an average dropout rate across the North Mississippi counties of as much as 34% between 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 2007, 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in the area numbered 6,548. The projected number of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students for 2008 is 6,800. According to research from the Mississippi Department of Education, the average graduation rate for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in the area is greater than 92%. Therefore, it can be estimated that greater than 6,256 students will graduate from high school in 2008 (Error = +/- 6.48%).

Projected 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in years 2009 and 2010 are 6,906 and 6,719 respectively. A slight decline in 12<sup>th</sup> grade students is projected for the years 2011 and 2012. However, these projections are based solely on current enrollment, and several factors, such as families moving in or out of a district, can influence the number of students in any given year.



Year	Projected Number of 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students
2007	6,548
2008	6,800
2009	6,906
2010	6,719
2011	6,146
2012	6,329
2013	6,143

From the projected number of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and, therefore, potential high school graduates, and recognizing that not all these individuals will continue with higher education, the assumption can be made that a portion of these individuals will be ready to enter the workforce directly from high school. With proper guidance and training being made available and communicated to these individuals, together with the prospect of a good job, they will undoubtedly form a large pool of future available workers for the area.

To conclude, the numbers of students currently enrolled at the high school, community college, and university levels show a significant number of potential available workers, both in professional and technical fields as well as skilled trades, for the North Mississippi area. Community colleges alone enroll nearly 50,000 students. And while not all of these students can translate specifically into available workers for a particular industry, the number of students pursuing higher training in the area bodes well for the workforce overall. With further emphasis on the importance of education and training, as well as the burgeoning availability of employment in the area, it is hoped that more students will take advantage of the opportunities available to them, thereby creating an even larger workforce in the North Mississippi region, one well-positioned to meet the needs of future employers.





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