

# PATHWAYS 2 POSSIBILITIES CAREER EXPO, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MISSISSIPPI



6/28/2019

Annual Evaluation Report

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

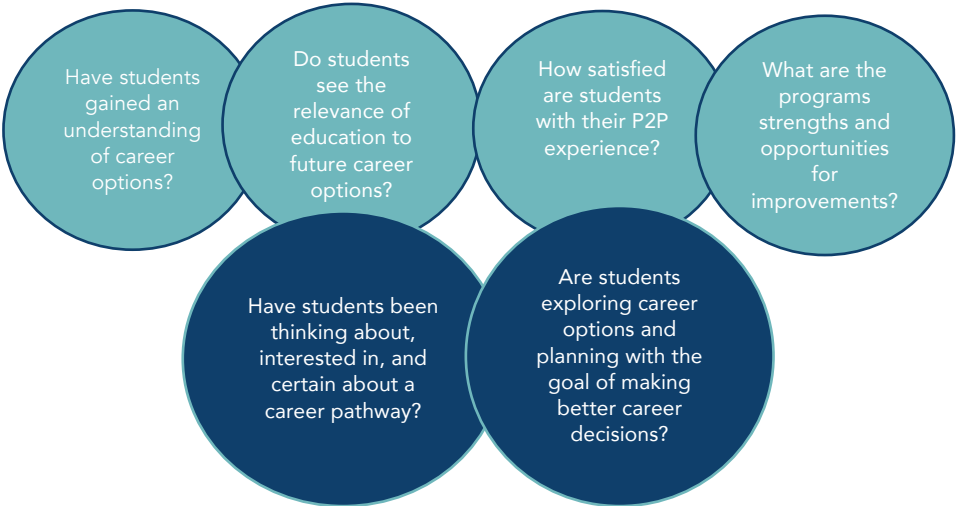
This document provides an overview of findings from the Pathways 2 Possibilities (P2P) Career Expos that were held on the Mississippi Coast (November 2018) and in the Delta (February 2019). It also provides an overview of findings from longitudinal surveys of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and graduating senior cohorts who attended previous Expos. These surveys were designed to track the longer-term effects of Career Expo attendance.

Data described in this report were collected and analyzed by the Center for Evaluation Research (CERE) at the University of Mississippi.

## BACKGROUND

The P2P program is a two-day event that seeks to engage 8th-grade students in thinking about the future, while exposing them to a wide variety of career pathways and allowing them to explore these opportunities through interactive exhibits with career professionals. The program informs students about the educational requirements for varying careers in each pathway, along with expected earnings and work conditions. The overarching goal is to encourage Career Expo attendees to look to the future and start career planning early, armed with knowledge about the academic choices that will support their career goals.

The P2P program has requested that **four questions** be explored as part of the Career Expo evaluation, along with **two additional questions** focused on 9<sup>th</sup> graders who attended the Career Expo last year, and a group of graduating seniors who attended the Career Expo when they were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade:



With these questions in mind, CERE selected a series of validated scales during the first year of this evaluation. These surveys capture data on the following dimensions:

1. Overall student outlook on future career pathways,
2. Perceived education needs,
3. Post-high school plans, and
4. A set of validated scales that capture underlying beliefs about career planning. These scales focus on factors that prior research shows are influential in shaping young people’s career planning practices. These include:
  - a. Career decision making factors (i.e. beliefs about the importance of career information and the need for self-knowledge),
  - b. Career outcome expectations (i.e. education performance expectations, and career decision expectations), and
  - c. Planning intentions (i.e. planning behaviors and intentions).

CERE also developed a short set of satisfaction items designed to capture information about students’ experiences at the P2P Career Expo. In particular, students were asked to gauge how influential attending the Career Expo was in helping them finalize post-high school graduation plans for education and career pathways.

## FINDINGS

### *Eighth Graders*

Overall, findings provide early evidence the Mississippi P2P Career Expo helped prompt 8<sup>th</sup> graders consider future career pathways, while also supporting understanding about post-high school training requirements. With that said, a number of effects observed on the Coast were not seen in the Delta this year, suggesting it may be valuable to delve more deeply into students’ experiences in the Delta (see Table 1).

*Table 1. High-level summary of findings*  
**Differences in outcomes at post-Expo when comparing attendees to non-attendees.**

Outcome domain	Coast	Delta
1. Thinking about Career Pathways	✓	■
2. Perceived education needs	✓	✓
3. Underlying beliefs about career planning	■	■
4. Career outcome expectations	■	■



Statistically significant difference between Expo attendees and those who did not attend.



No difference observed at this time.

## Outlook on Future Career Pathways

Overall, the 2018-2019 Mississippi P2P Career Expos appeared to influence some 8th graders' thinking about potential career pathways.

- **Coast:** At the post-test, students who attended the Coast Career Expo were significantly more likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to have thought about a future career path (76%) than those who did not attend (65%). A higher proportion of attendees were also sure they knew what they wanted to do for a career (70%) when compared to those who did not attend (60%,  $p = 0.01$ ).
- **Delta:** Among students who attended the Delta Career Expo, there were no statistically significant differences between students who attended the Career Expo (84%) and those who did not attend (80%) in terms of the number who had thought about a career path ( $p = 0.01$ ). Having said that the proportion of students who had thought about a career path was high across both groups. Additionally, there was also no statistically significant difference in students' level of certainty about career choices when comparing Delta students who attended the Career Expo (78%) and those who did not (85%,  $p = 0.02$ ).

## Relevance of Education to Future Career Options

Students who attended the Mississippi P2P Career Expos also reported differences in their future education plans, when compared to those who did not attend.

- **Coast:** A greater proportion of students who attended the Coast Career Expo said they were likely to obtain a college degree after graduating (58%) when compared to those who did not attend the event (54%;  $p < 0.001$ ). Fewer attendees also said they were undecided about plans after graduation (22%) when compared to those who did not attend, although this difference was not statistically significant (23%;  $p = 0.30$ ).
- **Delta:** Similarly, a greater proportion of students who attended the Delta Career Expo said they were likely to obtain a college degree after graduating (55%) when compared to those who did not attend the event (45%;  $p < 0.01$ ). Again, fewer attendees said they were undecided about plans after graduation (14%) when compared to those who did not attend (22%), however here to these differences were not statistically significant ( $p = 0.13$ ).
- Across both the Coast and Delta Expos, there appeared to be small shifts in student understanding about the need for specific college degrees after attending the P2P Career Expo.

For example, more students realized they needed a college degree, and more realized they needed a graduate degree after attending the Coast and Delta Career Expos.

### Beliefs about Career Planning

- **Coast:** When comparing those who did and did not attend the Coast Expo, there did not appear to be significant differences in students' underlying beliefs about (1) the need for career information, (2) the need for self-knowledge, (3) career decision-making outcome expectancies, (4) planning intentions, and (5) the connection between educational performance and career outcomes based on Expo attendance.
- **Delta:** Similarly, there were no significant differences in Delta students' underlying beliefs about (1) the need for career information, (2) the need for self-knowledge, (3) career decision-making outcome expectancies, (4) planning intentions, and (5) the connection between educational performance and career outcomes.
- These two findings are not particularly surprising given that it is challenging to change underlying beliefs. It is also understandable given that students can only spend a short amount of time at each event and only attend one time in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It may be that longer-term, repeated exposure, and more sustained interventions implemented in partnership with participating schools are required if P2P seeks to shape and influence these underlying beliefs.

### Student Satisfaction with the Mississippi Coast and Delta P2P Career Expo Experiences

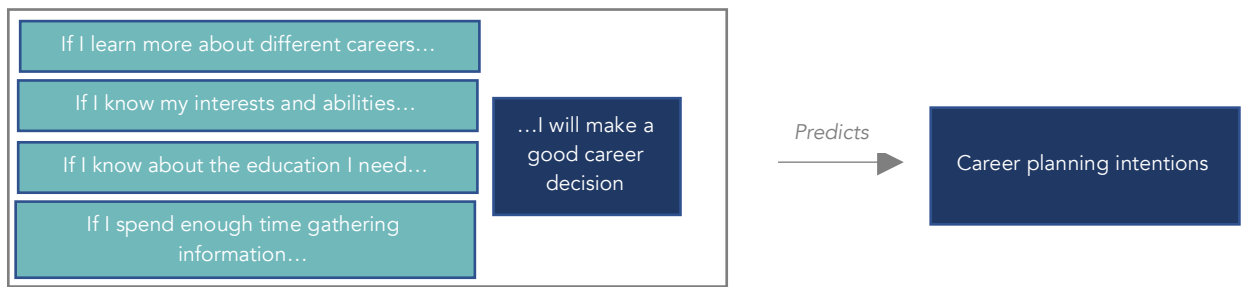
Although satisfaction with the Career Expos was generally high, students who attended the Coast Expo reported higher levels of satisfaction than students who attended the Delta Career Expo.

- Overall, 85% of Coast Career Expo attendees said they enjoyed the event, 84% agreed they enjoyed interacting with exhibitors, 68% agreed they found a pathway of interest, and 58% found a pathway they wanted to pursue. Among the 13% who were ambivalent (neutral) or did not enjoy the event, approximately 61% were male and 54% were White.
- Overall, 70% said they enjoyed the event, 70% agreed they enjoyed interacting with exhibitors, 58% agreed they found a pathway of interest, and 54% found a pathway they wanted to pursue. Among the 30% who were ambivalent (neutral) or did not enjoy the event, approximately 58% were male and 49% were Black/Multiracial.
- Interestingly, there were also similar differences in the proportions of students who were able to engage in a hands-on experience. There were 86% of Coast Career Expo attendees who tried a hands-on experience with at least one pathway compared to 71% of Delta Career Expo attendees.

- Trying at least one hands-on activity was significantly associated with satisfaction at both the Coast ( $p < 0.0001$ ; 75%) and Delta ( $p < 0.0001$ ; 56%) Career Expos with students having at least one hands-on experience reporting greater satisfaction.

### *Ninth Graders*

- Overall, there were few significant differences between 9<sup>th</sup> grader responses to the online survey, and their responses in the previous year. However, this may simply be due to the small number of students who completed both the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the 9<sup>th</sup> grade survey ( $n=25$ ). For this reason, these 9<sup>th</sup> grade results should be interpreted with caution.
- Of particular note, however, is the finding that career planning intentions (e.g. students' intentions to talk to counselors about their career options, or to spend time learning about career options) were lower among students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade (mean=3.81) than they were immediately following the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Career Expo (mean=4.02). Although these differences were not statistically significant, the data nonetheless suggest a dip in career planning intentions from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade among this group of students.
- Similarly, there was a slight decrease in participating students' interest in thinking about a future career pathway in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (80%) compared to the year before (84%).
- Interestingly, there was also a notable decrease in students' beliefs about the importance of understanding *what are my personal values?* from 8<sup>th</sup> grade (mean=4.5) to 9<sup>th</sup> grade (mean=4).
- Students' beliefs about the importance of education—and the likelihood that working hard at school would lead to positive outcomes—were also lower in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (mean=3.84) when compared to immediately after the Career Expo (mean=4.21).
- Moreover, students' beliefs about the relationship between career planning and positive career outcomes also decreased from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, immediately after the Career Expo (mean=4.3) to 9<sup>th</sup> grade (mean=4.0).
- Taken together, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade survey data provide tentative evidence to suggest that students experience a 'dip' in career planning intentions and beliefs when progressing from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Interestingly, 9<sup>th</sup> grade career decision outcome expectancies—a student's belief that engaging in career planning activities would lead to positive career outcomes—predicted 9<sup>th</sup> grade student career planning intentions over and above other factors explored in this survey. This suggests that activities designed to influence students' beliefs about career decision outcome expectancies may be required if programs are to shift student career planning in the longer-term (see Figure below).



### *Graduating Seniors*

- Seniors who attended a P2P Career Expo in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade were more likely to have plans to attend college after high school graduation (80%) than seniors who did not attend/were unsure (72%).
- However, seniors who attended the Career Expo were also less sure (78%) about their future career choice than students who did not attend or did not remember attending (94%).
- Seventy percent said the Career Expo event was influential on their post-high school graduation plans with 86% agreeing that they enjoyed the event.
- One particularly interesting finding from the senior survey was that 41% of graduating seniors said they had not received any type of career planning support from their school.
- With that said, there were no statistically significant associations between receiving career planning support at school and seniors who knew what they wanted to do when older.

### *Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement*

The P2P Career Expo appears to be a positive experience for the majority of those who attend. Students who attended the Mississippi Coast and Delta P2P Career Expos felt the events helped to shape their awareness of, and thinking about, career opportunities, pathways, and required education to achieve future career goals. Students from both events also agreed in their enjoyment of hands-on activities, opportunities to speak with career professionals, and interaction with student peers.

Comparative data also show that Coast students who attend are more likely to have begun thinking about career pathways and used the P2P Career Expo to refine their understanding about the educational requirements for their intended careers. In this way, the P2P Career Expos in Mississippi appear to represent a positive starting point for students' thinking about career opportunities. This is consistent with earlier findings about P2P Career Expos held elsewhere in addition to those findings from the 2019 South Carolina Career Expo.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Acknowledging that the P2P Career Expo at the Coast and Delta locations did not appear to shift some students' underlying beliefs about career planning, it may be that there is a need for a partnership with schools and school counselors to provide more career planning support to graduating seniors throughout high school; however, this is likely out of the current scope of the P2P goals and objectives.
- While the vast majority of students enjoyed their time at the P2P Career Expo, the survey data suggest that a small group of students (est. 15% from the Coast event and 30% from the Delta event) did not rate the event highly. With this in mind, it may be useful for P2P to engage further with these groups to better understand their experience(s) and the factors that might further engage Delta students.
- Potential suggestions for adaptation emerging from the survey data include broadening the pathways present to include careers in trucking, art, and more law and healthcare options.
- Additionally, an interesting finding from this study is that there are a small number of career pathways for which there was little to no interest among participating students (e.g. Finance, Energy, and Government/Public Administration from the Coast and Aerospace, Agriculture Food/Natural Resources, Energy, and Transportation/Distribution/Logistics from the Delta). It may be valuable to map student interests to anticipated job growth in Career Expo locations so that P2P can assess whether some pathways—specifically those with higher expected jobs growth over the coming years—might benefit from additional support when developing exhibits to ensure they attract an appropriate number of students.
- It is recommended that future rounds of data collection include mechanisms to identify individual students so that individual-level change from pre to post Career Expo can be captured in more detail.