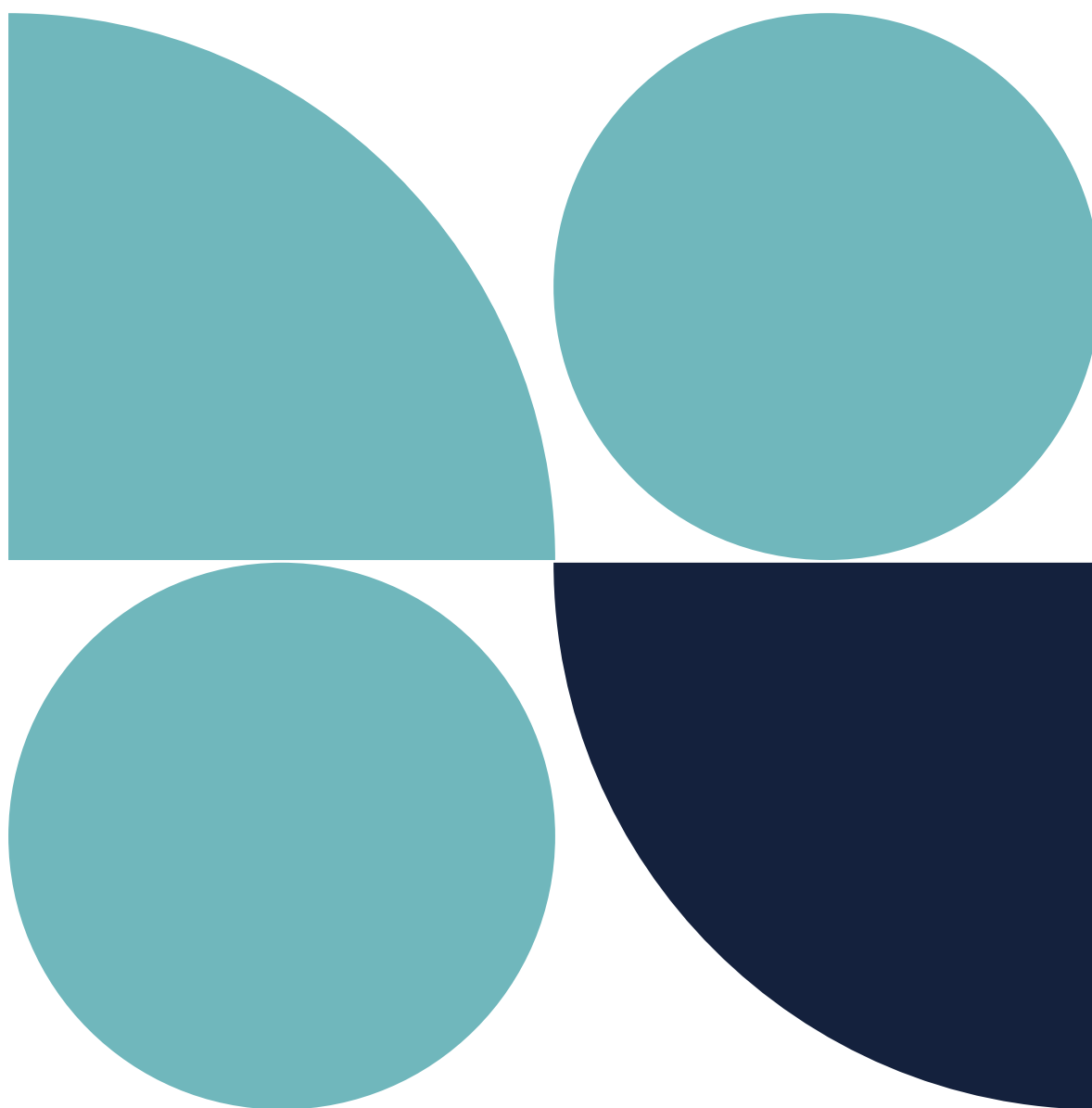


P2P Mississippi Annual Report



Executive Summary

The P2P Mississippi Career Expo program introduces 8th grade students to a broad range of career pathways aligned with the Mississippi Department of Education's career clusters. In 2024 and 2025, the Center for Research Evaluation (CERE) evaluated two regional Expos: the 2024 Gulf Coast Career Expo and the 2025 Mississippi Delta Career Expo. The evaluation examined students' experiences, career awareness, planning readiness, and engagement with industry professionals.

“

I liked learning about the careers I wasn't even thinking about

”

Key Findings by Site

1. High Levels of Student Satisfaction

On the Coast, 76% of students reported enjoying the Expo, with 77% expressing overall satisfaction. Students especially valued hands-on activities and the opportunity to explore new fields. In the Delta, 67% of students enjoyed the event, and 66.6% reported being satisfied. Students highlighted the friendliness of exhibitors and appreciated interactive exhibits.

2. Increased Career Awareness and Planning Confidence

On the Coast, students showed consistent, statistically significant improvement across all career planning knowledge indicators. In the Delta, post-survey scores showed moderate statistically significant gains in knowing how to get career information, finding careers aligned with their interests, and other career planning capacity measures. At the same time, Delta expo participants showed a statistically significant decrease in their certainty about future educational and career plans following the expo, which may suggest that students became more uncertain or reconsidered their plans based on new information or exposure to unfamiliar career paths.

3. Career Interests Reflect Regional and National Trends

On the Coast, top interests included Health Science (16.5%), STEM (12.9%), and Arts & Communications (11.4%). In the Delta, students most frequently selected Health Science (16.3%), followed by Business Management (10.1%) and Law & Public Safety (9.6%).

4. Strong Engagement, with Potential to Expand in Follow-Up

On the Coast, 82% of students spoke with an exhibitor about a career of interest, but only 40% collected contact information; over one-third were unaware they could do so. In the Delta, 83% of students engaged in conversation with an exhibitor—slightly higher than the Gulf Coast—but only about half received contact info. One in four students didn't know this was an option.

Growth Opportunities

- Schools can implement lightweight follow-up activities to help students solidify learning and develop concrete goals.
- Students who used the booklet found it helpful. Pre-event preparation that includes the booklet could increase the number of students who engage with it.
- Provide conversation prompts and encourage students to request contact info to promote longer-term connections with industry professionals.
- Recruit more exhibitors from high-demand fields to align student exposure with workforce needs.
- Event organizers should review layout, pacing, and ratios to optimize participant flow and logistics.

“

It was a good event to find careers I might want to pursue

”

Takeaways

Both the Gulf Coast and Delta P2P Career Expos were successful in sparking student interest and broadening career awareness at a critical developmental stage. Regional differences exist in clarity about students' career goals and educational pathways and in student interest areas. **Students across both sites demonstrated increased knowledge about career options, required education/training, career alignment with interests, exploration strategies, and decision-making readiness.** With continued improvement in follow-up, logistics, and outreach, the program can strengthen its impact on students and its alignment with Mississippi's workforce development priorities.

“

I loved how the people were very nice and how the firefighters let me try on the gear

”



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Background

The Mississippi P2P Mississippi Career Expos focused on introducing 8th grade students to career opportunities in the state of Mississippi. Eighth grade is widely recognized as an opportune point in the academic trajectory to introduce students to a broad array of future careers and opportunities, help students pre-plan their academic curriculums to specific career interests, and establish contacts for future mentoring.

Students participated in career presentations and interacted with professionals across 16 categories of work aligned with Mississippi Department of Education's career pathways. Goals for the expo included:

To guide students in exploring careers early and begin planning for future careers

To assist students in thinking about the academic courses and level of education required to pursue their future career goals

The P2P theory of change is rooted in the idea that students with defined career aspirations and a four-year high school curriculum plan are more likely to stay in school, perform well academically, and enter college better prepared and committed.

To this end, CERE's evaluation explored four primary questions:

- What were students' experiences in the Mississippi Career Expo?
- Have students gained an understanding of their career options?
- What career pathways are of most interest to students in 2024?
- How are students planning for future career pathways?

Methods

Eight grade students attending the P2P MS Expo completed a 32-item pre-survey that explored each participant's career aspirations and their knowledge of qualifications required for specific types of jobs. Students completed the pre-survey using an online link to Qualtrics, an online survey tool widely used in academia and business. Links to the pre-survey were distributed to teachers on the Gulf Coast and in the Mississippi Delta and these teachers then provided the link to their students. All 8th graders from participating schools in Mississippi were invited to complete the pre-survey prior to attending the Career Expo.

Following the Career Expo, students completed a 42-item post survey covering career interests, career pathways, awareness and constraints as well as general questions about the Expo experience. Similar to the pre-survey, a link to the survey was sent to teachers who distributed it to students attending the Career Expo on the Gulf Coast and in the Mississippi Delta. In the final dataset, 1,189 students from the Gulf Coast and 574 students in the Delta completed both a pre- and post-survey and were included in analysis. Paired samples T-tests were used to test for significance in the change from pre-to-post test score for each student. Statistical significance in this document is reported at the level of $p < 0.05$.

Findings: MS Gulf Coast

Demographic information

CERE analyzed data collected from N=1189 8th graders who took both the pre-test and the post-test from 23 schools on the Gulf Coast (Table 1). The findings in this section of the report are based on data collected from these students.

Table 1. Number of Survey Participants by Gulf Coast School

Bay Waveland Middle	76
Bayou View Middle	175
Biloxi Jr. High	44
Earl Travillion Attendance Center	20
East Central Middle	34
George County Middle	57
Gulfport Central Middle	64
Hancock Middle	149
N. R. Burger Middle STEM	18
North Gulfport 8th	25
Ocean Springs Middle	121
Pass Christian Middle	18
Picayune Jr. High	56
St. Martin Middle	138
Vancleave Middle	74
West Jones Middle	10
A school not listed here	100
D'Iberville Middle	3 or fewer participants
GCT Homeschool	
HEARTS Homeschool Co-op	
Hope Academy	
Pearl River Central Middle	
Resurrection Catholic High School	
Sand Hill Attendance Center	
Total	1189

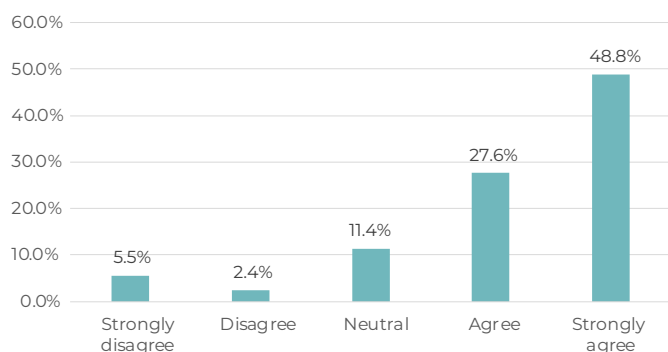
The majority of participants were 13 or 14 years old. At age 13 to 14, participants are preparing to enter middle or high school—a prime time to pique their interest in different careers and learning about the academic courses necessary for specific career pathways. Slightly more girls than boys attended the 2024 Career Expo, but there was no statistically meaningful difference in participation based on gender.

Evaluation Question 1: What were MS Gulf Coast students' experiences in the Mississippi Career Expo?

Among students who attended the MS Gulf Coast P2P Career Expo, the majority reported a positive experience. More than three-fourths (76.4%) agreed that they enjoyed the event, while fewer than 8% disagreed. Similarly, when asked about their overall satisfaction with the Expo, over three-fourths of students (76.7%) reported being satisfied with their experience, and only a small proportion (4.6%) indicated any dissatisfaction.

Overall, these findings suggest that students viewed the Expo positively and were broadly satisfied with their experience.

The majority of students reported agreeing with the statement: "I enjoyed the expo."



The majority of students reported enjoying the Expo. The following responses are typical examples:

“ It was a good event to find careers I might want to pursue ”

“ I liked how we got to use hands on learning to explore the different career paths. ”

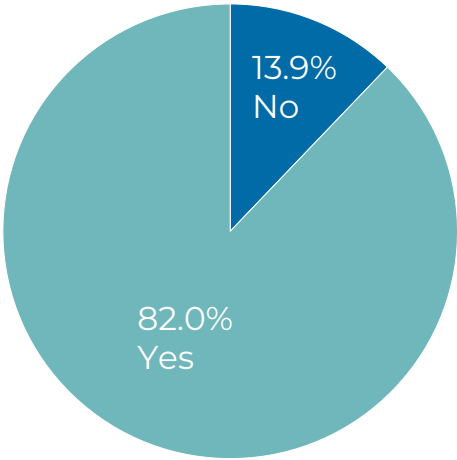
“ I liked learning about the careers I wasn't even thinking about ”

“ I liked the sense of being grown up as I got to go through and learn about my future without feeling like it's a school event. ”

Engagement with Exhibitors

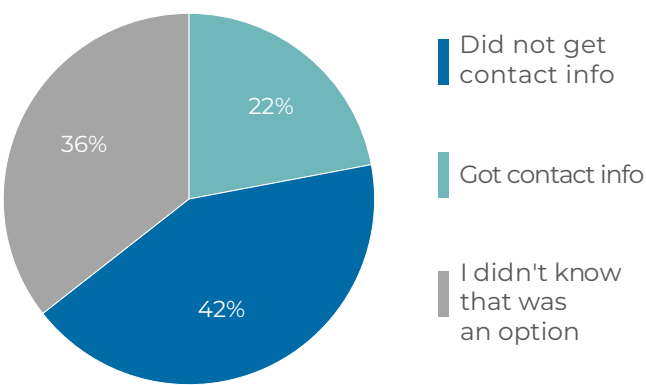
Students were asked if during the Expo they chatted at least one exhibitor about what it was like to work in a career pathway that interested them. A large proportion of students (82.0%) who attended the Expo reported talking to an exhibitor to discuss a career pathway of interest to them, while only 13.9% did not.

A large proportion of students reported chatting with an exhibitor about a career pathway that interested them.



Students were also asked if during the Expo they received the contact info of at least one exhibitor to engage in future discussions about a career pathway that interested them. A sizable proportion of students (40.4%) who attended the Expo reported getting contact information from an exhibitor to further discuss a career pathway of interest to them, while over a fifth (21.0%) did not. However, over one-third (33.9%) responded that they were not aware that they could get exhibitors' contact information.

Over half of students did not get contact information from an exhibitor, and of those, many did not know that they could do this.



In sum, student experiences at the Expo were largely favorable and positive. Over three-quarters of students reported enjoying and being satisfied by their experience at the Expo, variously describing the informational, experiential, and social aspects of the Expo as what they liked best.



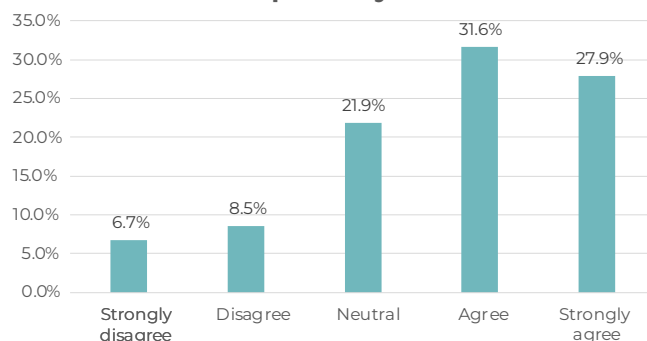
Evaluation Question 2: Have students gained an understanding of their career options?

Survey findings suggest that the P2P Expo helped many students expand their understanding of career pathways. Nearly two-thirds of students (59.5%) agreed that the Expo helped them identify a career pathway of interest, while only 15.2% disagreed. About two in five students (40.5%) reported that they learned about salary ranges for various careers, though more than one-quarter (26.7%) did not find the event useful in this regard.

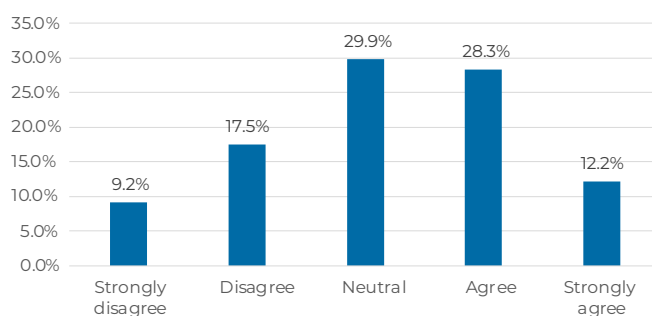
The majority of students (62.4%) indicated that the Expo introduced them to career pathways they had not been aware of previously, with only 13.3% disagreeing. Finally, close to half of students (44.4%) reported that they found a career pathway at the Expo they planned to pursue. However, nearly one-third (29.0%) remained neutral on this point, and close to one-quarter (23.3%) indicated that they did not find a career pathway they intended to pursue.

Overall, these results indicate that Expo attendance was associated with broadening students' awareness of career options, and a proportion of students left with a clear plan to pursue a specific pathway.

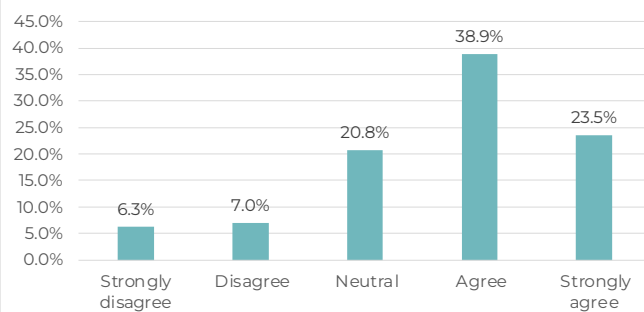
I found a career pathway that interests me.



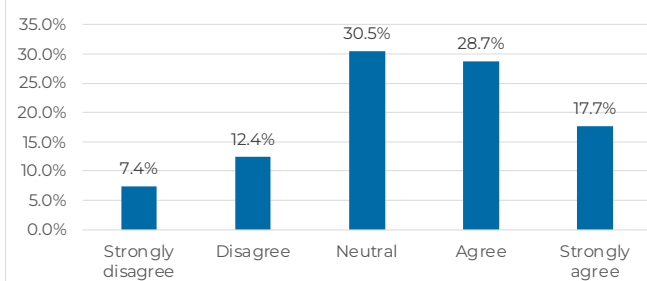
I learned about the salary ranges for various career pathways.



I learned about career pathways I was not aware of before the event.



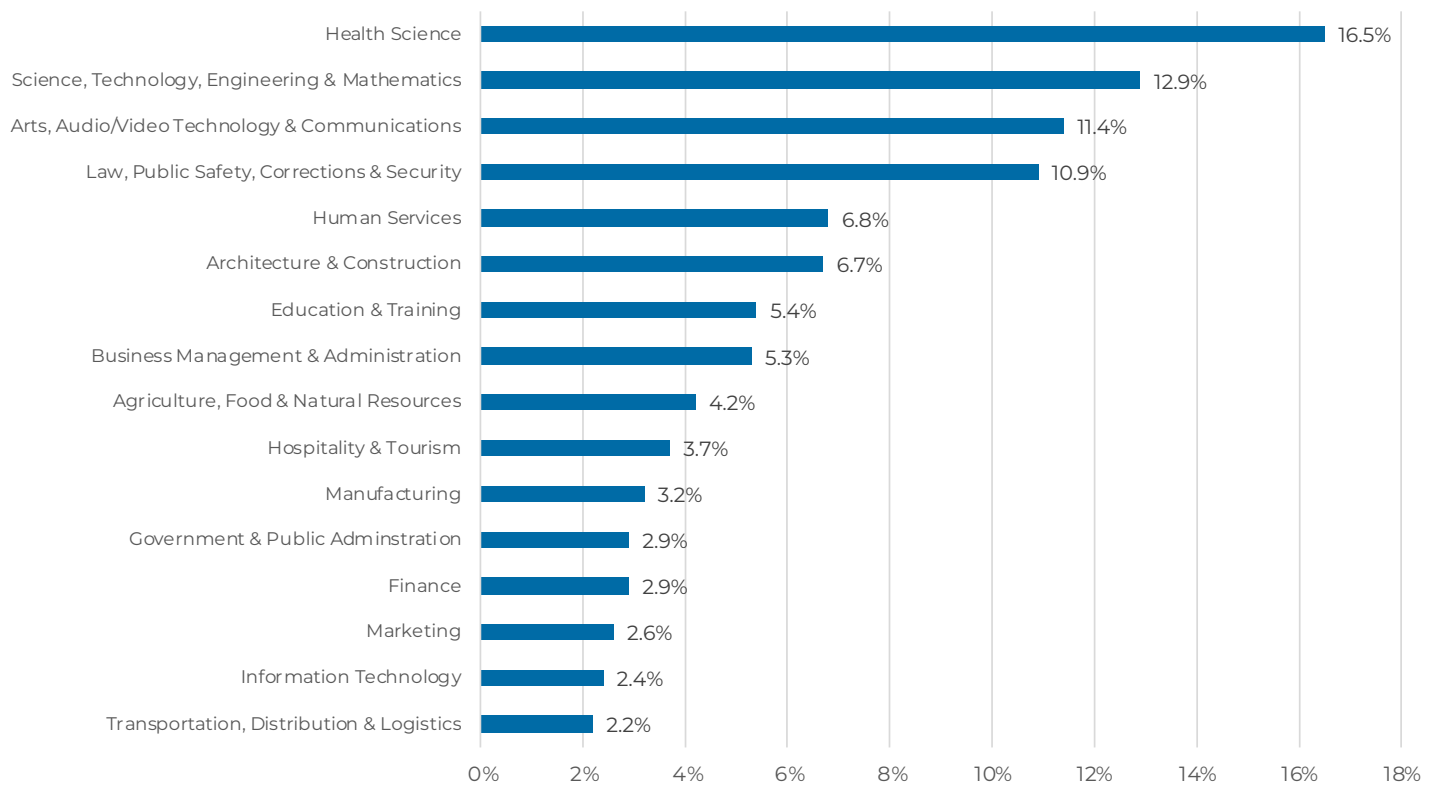
I learned something at the event that is going to influence how long I stay in school.



Evaluation Question 3: What career pathways are of most interest to students in 2024?

Students completing the post-Expo survey were asked to choose in which of the 16 broad career clusters they would most like to work. The following chart shows the percentage of students who selected each broad career cluster.

The largest share of students (16.5%) reported interest in careers in the fields of Health Sciences and Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (12.9%) highlighting the salience of these sectors in the 21st century followed by Interest in Arts, Audio/Video Technology, & Communications (11.4%) and Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security (10.9%) .



Evaluation Question 4: How are students planning for future career pathways?

Students completed the same set of career-planning questions on both the pre- and post-surveys to assess how the Expo may have influenced their preparation for future career pathways. They were asked to respond on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicated knowing less about a given topic and 10 indicated knowing more.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Pre-Test Average</i>	<i>Post-Test Average</i>
Do you know what you want to do for a career when you are older?	6.95	7.40*
Do you know what you plan to do next after graduating high school?	6.67	7.26*
How much do you know about the different career options that may be available to you?	5.33	6.22*
Do you know what kind of training or education you need in order to have the kind of career you want?	6.03	6.72*
How many careers do you know of that relate to your own interests and abilities?	5.65	6.00*
Do you know how to find out about new kinds of careers?	5.71	6.73*
Do you have the information you need to make decisions about what career to pursue?	5.41	6.35*

The comparison of pre- and post-survey responses shows that students experienced statistically significant improvements across all seven measures related to career planning. These findings suggest that Expo attendance was associated with an increase in students' knowledge and readiness to plan for their futures. Students reported increased clarity about their long-term career goals and short-term plans after high school, with average scores rising from 6.95 to 7.40 and from 6.67 to 7.26, respectively. Their awareness of the range of career options available to them also improved, as did their understanding of the education and training required to pursue those careers. Notably, the most substantial gains were in students' ability to find out about new kinds of careers and their confidence in having the information needed to make career decisions—areas that are crucial for independent career exploration. Overall, the results indicate that students who attended the Expo demonstrated increased preparedness for future career pathways.

Findings: MS Delta

Demographic Information

CERE analyzed data collected from N=574 MS Delta 8th graders who took both the pre-test and the post-test from 28 schools in Mississippi. The findings in this section of the report are based on data collected from these students.

Number of Survey Participants by MS Delta School

Drew Hunter Middle	12
Greenwood Middle	92
J.Z. George High	15
Leflore Co. High 7-12	11
Leland School Park	16
Manchester Academy	12
O.M. McNair Middle School	34
Robert L. Merritt Jr. High	31
Ruleville Middle	6
Simmons Junior High	7
T.L. Weston Middle	65
Tunica Middle School	42
Warren Central Junior High	21
Washington School	19
West Bolivar High School (7-12)	23
West Tallahatchie Middle School (West Side)	27
Bolton-Edwards Elementary	8
Cleveland Central Middle	109
Woolfolk Middle School	6
A school not listed here	6
Academy of Innovation	3 or fewer participants
Bayou Academy	
Indianola Academy	
Lee Academy	
Moorhead Central School	
Northside High School	
Charleston Middle (East Tallahatchie)	
Delta Academy	
Yazoo County Middle School	
Total	574

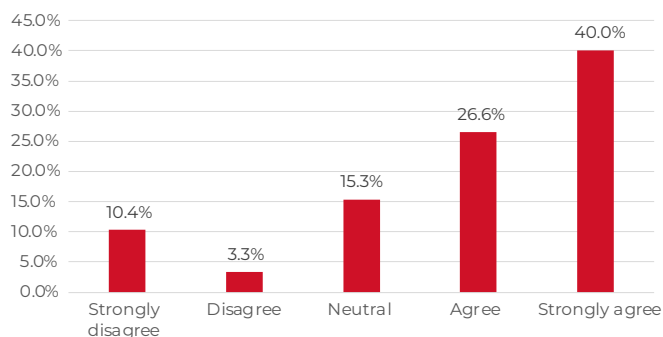
Students self-reported the following demographic characteristics. The majority of participants were 13 or 14 years old, and slightly more girls than boys attended the 2024 Career Expo. The vast majority of students identified as Black or African American (83.5%). Smaller proportions identified as White (9.2%), Multiracial (3.6%), American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian (1.8%), and Asian or Pacific Islander (1.3%).

Evaluation Question 1: What were MS Delta students' experiences in the Mississippi Career Expo?

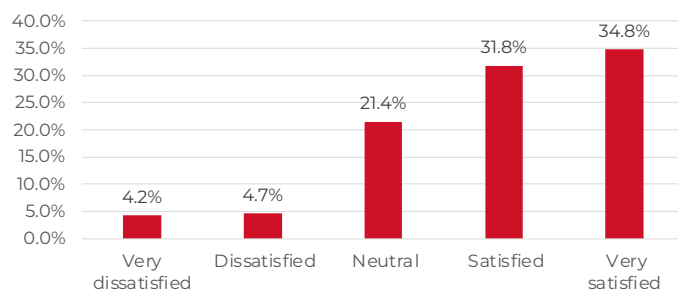
Among MS Delta students who attended the P2P Career Expo, most reported a positive experience. When asked to rate their agreement with the statement "I enjoyed the career expo," two-thirds of students (66.6%) agreed or strongly agreed. Only a small portion (13.7%) expressed disagreement.

Overall, these findings suggest that students viewed the Expo positively and were broadly satisfied with their experience.

The majority of students reported agreeing with the statement: "I enjoyed the expo."



The majority of students reported high satisfaction with their P2P expo experience.



The majority of students reported enjoying the Expo. The following responses are typical examples:

I liked the fact that I could actually interact with stuff that resembles stuff from the actual career path.

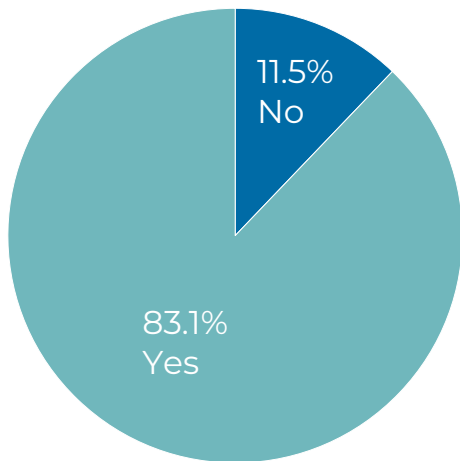
I liked getting to talk to people about different jobs other than the one I'm interested in right now because it shows me that there are different jobs out there for me

I loved how the people were very nice and how the firefighters let me try on the gear

Engagement with Exhibitors

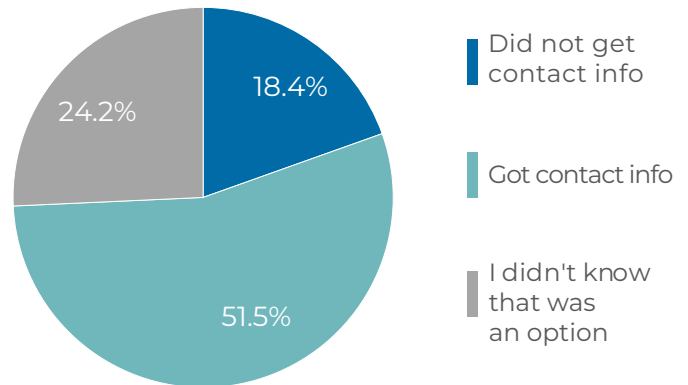
Students were asked if during the Expo they chatted at least one exhibitor about what it was like to work in a career pathway that interested them. A large proportion of students (83.1%) who attended the Expo reported talking to an exhibitor to discuss a career pathway of interest to them. This was a larger share of students than at the Gulf Coast Expo.

A large proportion of students reported chatting with an exhibitor about a career pathway that interested them.



Students were also asked if during the Expo they received the contact info of at least one exhibitor to engage in future discussions about a career pathway that interested them. A majority of students (51.5%) who attended the Expo reported getting contact information from an exhibitor to further discuss a career pathway of interest to them, while 18.4% did not. Nearly one quarter (24.2%) of students responded that they were not aware that they could get exhibitors' contact information.

Over half of students did not get contact information from an exhibitor, and of those, many did not know that they could do this.



In sum, student experiences at the MS Delta Expo were largely positive and similarly aligned to responses from the Gulf Coast expo. Across both events, students highlighted themes of interactivity of exhibits, hospitality of the exhibitors, and the extra-curricular setting of the event as their favorite components of the event.



Evaluation Question 2: Have students gained an understanding of their career options?

Students were asked whether they found a career pathway that interested them as a result of attending the Career Expo. Over half (56.8%) agreed that they did, while 18.6% disagreed.

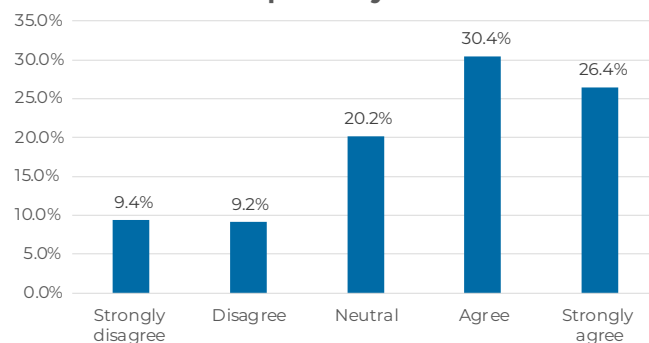
When asked whether the Expo helped them learn about salary ranges for different careers, nearly half of students (50.3%) agreed, although 21.5% did not feel the event helped them gain this information.

A majority of students (53.9%) agreed that they learned about career pathways they had not previously been aware of, suggesting the Expo introduced many students to new options. Only 18.5% disagreed with this statement.

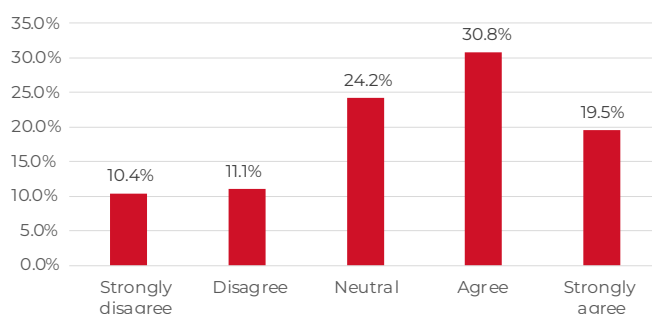
Finally, students were asked whether they learned something at the Expo that would influence how long they stayed in school. Just over half (50.4%) agreed that they had, while 18.2% disagreed.

Taken together, these results suggest that the Career Expo helped many students explore new career options and reflect on the steps—such as continued education—needed to pursue them.

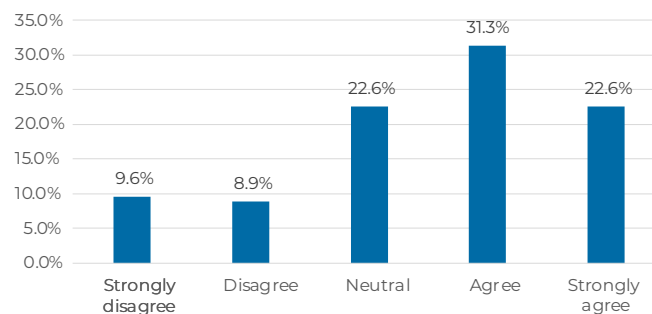
I found a career pathway that interests me.



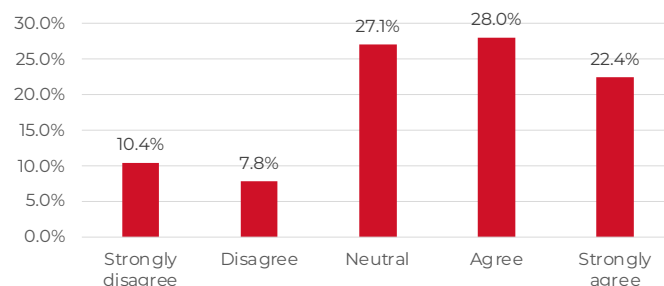
I learned about the salary ranges for various career pathways.



I learned about career pathways I was not aware of before the event.



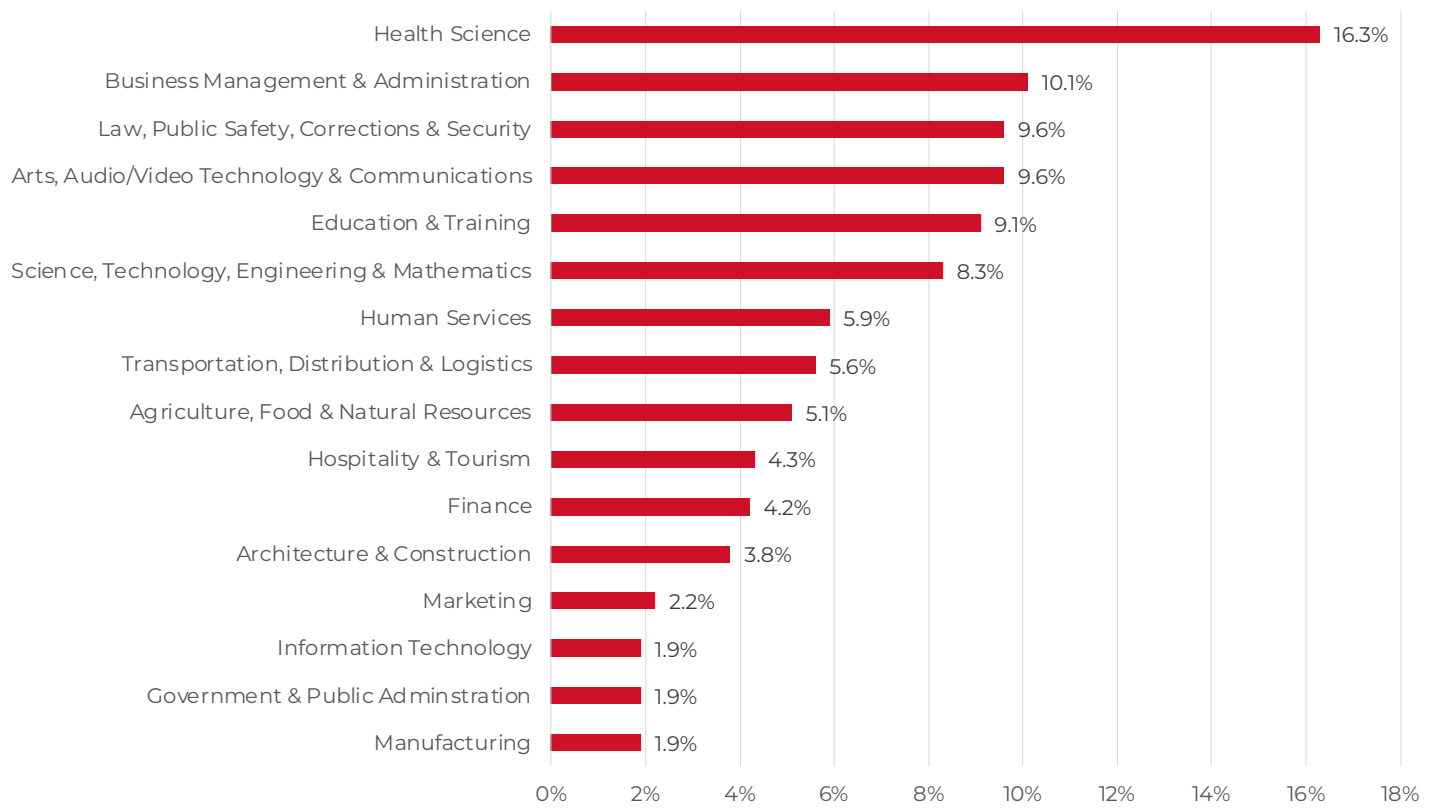
I learned something at the event that is going to influence how long I stay in school.



Evaluation Question 3: What career pathways are of most interest to students in 2024?

Students completing the post-Expo survey were asked to choose in which of the 16 broad career clusters they would most like to work. The following chart shows the percentage of students who selected each broad career cluster.

The most commonly selected career interest among students was Health Science, with 16.3% indicating this pathway. Business Management & Administration was the second most selected field (10.1%), followed closely by Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security and Arts, Audio/Video Technology & Communications, which each accounted for 9.6% of responses.



Evaluation Question 4: How are students planning for future career pathways?

Students completed the same set of career-planning questions on both the pre- and post-surveys to assess how the Expo may have influenced their preparation for future career pathways. They were asked to respond on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicated knowing less about a given topic and 10 indicated knowing more.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Pre-Test Average</i>	<i>Post-Test Average</i>
Do you know what you want to do for a career when you are older?	7.65	7.48*
Do you know what you plan to do next after graduating high school?	7.29	7.19*
How much do you know about the different career options that may be available to you?	5.46	6.20*
Do you know what kind of training or education you need in order to have the kind of career you want?	6.23	6.65*
How many careers do you know of that relate to your own interests and abilities?	5.53	6.06*
Do you know how to find out about new kinds of careers?	6.28	6.98*
Do you have the information you need to make decisions about what career to pursue?	5.75	6.24*

Two items actually showed small decreases from pre- to post-survey: “Do you know what you want to do for a career when you are older?” decreased from 7.65 to 7.48 and “Do you know what you plan to do next after graduating high school?” decreased from 7.29 to 7.19. These declines are relatively small but are statistically significant and may suggest that, after attending the Expo, some students became more uncertain or reconsidered their plans based on new information or exposure to unfamiliar career paths.

The remaining five items all showed statistically significant increases, indicating growth in students’ knowledge about career options, required education/training, alignment with interests, exploration strategies, and decision-making readiness. Taken together, these results indicate that the Expo helped students strengthen their knowledge base and explore a broader range of options, supporting more informed and proactive career planning.

Conclusions

Findings from the 2024 Mississippi Gulf Coast and 2025 Mississippi Delta P2P Career Expos indicate that the events were broadly successful in achieving their primary goals: introducing 8th grade students to a range of career pathways and supporting early-stage career exploration. Students across both regions reported high levels of satisfaction with the Expo experience, especially appreciating the hands-on activities and opportunities to speak with professionals in various industries. Importantly, pre- to post-survey comparisons demonstrate growth in students' awareness of career options, understanding of training and education requirements, and ability to find new career information.

Reinforce Student Curiosity Through Post-Expo Activities

Survey data show that the Expo successfully sparked student curiosity. For example, over 60% of Gulf Coast students and over 50% of Delta students reported learning about new career pathways. This indicates an opportunity to deepen learning and reflection after the event.

Recommendation: Schools should implement lightweight follow-up activities—such as short classroom reflections, journaling prompts, or guided group discussions—to help students process what they learned and continue exploring. These activities can extend the Expo's influence and support students in forming more concrete goals.

Increase Visibility and Use of the P2P Booklet

The post-survey revealed that while most students who used the P2P booklet found it helpful, only about half of attendees reported receiving one. While this may indicate a distribution problem, it could also result from students forgetting or not fully utilizing the booklet.

Recommendation: Teachers could be encouraged to integrate the booklet into pre-survey activities to increase familiarity and use.

Normalize and Facilitate Student–Exhibitor Engagement

Although over 80% of students at both events spoke with at least one exhibitor, a significant portion—over one-third in the Gulf Coast and nearly one-quarter in the Delta—were unaware they could request follow-up contact information. This suggests a missed opportunity to deepen exposure to real-world careers.

Recommendation: At the beginning of the Expo, provide students with a short guide or verbal orientation encouraging them to engage with exhibitors and collect contact information. A simple “conversation card” with example questions and a prompt to request contact details could empower more students to initiate meaningful dialogue.

Target Exhibitor Outreach to Fill Gaps in Student Exposure

Student interest concentrated in a few high-profile clusters—particularly Health Science, STEM (Gulf Coast), and Business or Public Safety (Delta)—but sectors such as Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Automotive had much lower representation, despite being areas of workforce demand in Mississippi.

Recommendation: Future Expos may recruit exhibitors from underrepresented high-demand industries, especially in regions where student interest currently lags. This could broaden students' understanding of career possibilities and better align their exposure with state workforce development priorities.

Use Student Feedback to Improve Event Flow and Structure

While most students expressed enthusiasm for the Expo, several common themes emerged in open-ended suggestions for improvement: the need for more hands-on activities, more variety in exhibitors, less crowding, and more time to explore.

Recommendation: Venue personnel could be helpful in reviewing floor plans, session pacing, and the ratio of students to exhibitors to improve flow and accessibility. Gathering and reviewing post-event feedback annually can support iterative improvements to logistics and student experience.

These suggestions echo the overall sentiment that students were engaged and enthusiastic, but that improvements in variety, organization, and space could make the experience even more impactful.

By building on students' excitement, encouraging deeper follow-up, and fine-tuning logistics, the P2P Career Expo can be further optimized as a platform for guiding Mississippi students toward the state's future workforce needs.

Aligning student interests with high opportunity industries not only supports individual career development but also strengthens regional economic resilience.



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