



SKILLS INDEX BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

What is the Skills Index? The Skills Index is a tool to measure the number of people trained in high-demand programs at Mississippi's community colleges and universities. Akin to stock market indices, the Skills Index is an indicator of growth in strategic training and not a comprehensive measure of job training in Mississippi.

Why is the Skills Index needed? In Mississippi and across the country, there is a known skills gap, meaning not enough people have been trained to qualify for the highly technical skills many companies need today. About 65% of available jobs today and in the future require these skills, and these jobs pay well above average, often 2-3 times the private sector average. To close the gap, Mississippi simply needs to train more people in the demanded areas. The Skills Index will aid in measuring growth needed to meet demand and close the gap.

Does Mississippi have the right programs to train more people for these skills? Yes. Mississippi's 15 community colleges offer training and apprenticeships for high-demand skills. Additionally, Mississippi's 4-year universities train for other high-demand professions like engineering and computer science. Even in some high schools, students have the opportunity to start career training pathways. The need is to increase the number of people entering and completing the high-demand programs.

What programs make up the Skills Index? Data was collected on 385 community college programs and 43 university programs to comprise The Skills Index. These programs provide education and training for priority sectors like manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, energy and logistics. Completions in these programs has increased 58% over the past 10 years, but growth must accelerate to meet demand.

Why is the goal to double output? Data indicates there are 20,000-25,000 of these high-demand, high-pay jobs currently available in Mississippi, where businesses are seeking qualified individuals. Even modest economic growth will add thousands more in demand each year, so rapid acceleration is needed to begin closing the gap. While the first few years should be focused on growing enrollment in these programs, acceleration in output is not expected to be noticeable until 2-3 years from now as many of the targeted programs take two years to complete.

How will it be used, and what's next? The Skills Index will help measure progress and put a spotlight on a top educational policy issue for the coming years. What gets measured gets done, and if Mississippi is to outpace the country in closing the skills gap and growing jobs, accelerated growth in skills training is required. Much consideration should be given by policymakers on how to accomplish this goal. Additionally, more Mississippians need to know about these great opportunities and how to access them. For more information on high-demand careers and training, visit <http://getonthegridms.com>