



A Regional Spotlight on Memphis, Tennessee

Just as we focus on people, we must also focus on places if we want our college attainment efforts to succeed. Clearly, if place matters in any effort to effect social change, the city or metro area may be the place that matters most. While many factors contribute to the quality of life in a city, its education attainment level is a powerful determinant. More educated cities tend to be healthier, greener, and more economically vibrant. An educated city demands better schools, values diversity, and embraces the arts. We know that cities can be especially fertile ground for growing the kind of vibrant, cross-sector collaborations that lead to large-scale improvement in college attainment. These efforts work best when they involve all of the relevant stakeholders: that is, political, business, education, philanthropic, faith-based, and community leaders.

— Jamie P. Merisotis, President & CEO, Lumina Foundation
Memphis Mayors Meeting, April 19, 2012

The website of the Mayor's Office of Memphis includes a surprising graphic. It shows a ranking of cities with the highest numbers of residents 25 or older who have earned a four-year degree. What makes it surprising is that Memphis is ranked close to last, number 47 out of 51. Not many cities show off rankings in which they finish near the bottom. But, in Memphis, the mayor is using this information to express a sense of urgency. It is a call on the community to change those statistics—to say, "We can do better." It is also evidence of what sets Memphis apart from many other metropolitan areas. Here, workforce education and development are placed at the heart of a broader regional strategy around economic development and civic growth. There is also strong leadership and coordination from both the Mayor's Office and a multifaceted public-private partnership. With a host of initiatives

under way, the city is seeing business, community, government, and higher education leaders working together—and attracting significant state and federal resources—to help them reach their goals.

MEMPHIS: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Memphis is a midsize southern city with a population of nearly 650,000. Known as "America's Distribution Center," Memphis is one of the country's key logistics hubs, with what is considered the world's busiest cargo airport, its port on the Mississippi river, and its major trucking and rail networks. The city has a history as a major trade center for cotton and other crops, but also enjoys a broad economic base beyond agribusiness. Memphis's economy is diverse,

Lumina Foundation Goal 2025: Promoting Postsecondary Attainment

A Regional Spotlight on Memphis, Tennessee

Memphis on the Move: Fast Facts

2007 Chamber of Commerce identifies over 660,000 who are underemployed or unemployed and wanting to work; 40% reports wanting to gain additional skills.

2012-13 Memphis ranks as the 4th “happiest city for job-seeking grads” (2012) and 4th “happiest city to work in right now” (2013) by Forbes.

2014 Memphis ranks #9 on the Forbes list of 19 “Opportunity Cities: Places where it might be easier to make your mark.”

with robust manufacturing, services, healthcare, and financial companies located in the region. Three Fortune 500 companies—FedEx, AutoZone, and International Paper—locate their headquarters in Memphis, as do numerous science and technology companies. In recent years, significant workforce and economic development efforts in the region have brought an influx of manufacturing companies and the expansion of existing companies. The city, also known for its blues and barbecue, is home to multiple colleges and universities and hosts a major civil rights museum.

At the same time, Memphis has its challenges. In fall 2014, Memphis had the highest poverty level in the country for cities with less than one million residents. The public school system has also struggled and has been at the center of major reform efforts over the last several years. First, Memphis citizens voted to dismantle the city school system and then merged with nearby Shelby County schools. After additional organizational upheaval in Shelby County, it now encompasses eight school districts, including the “Achievement School District” (ASD), a state-run district designed to move Tennessee’s lowest-performing schools into the top quartile within five years. ASD currently serves 16 of the state’s 80 lowest-performing schools (most located in Memphis city) and plans to increase that number each year. To meet the need beyond ASD’s current capacity, Shelby County Schools also operates the Innovation Zone (IZone) serving an additional 13

low-performing schools. Even amidst this turmoil, schools have made progress. The Achievement School District is making some progress moving their schools out of the bottom level. The IZone has outperformed the ASD for the past two years, with several IZone schools designated as Tennessee “Reward Schools” in 2014 for being in the top five percent of schools statewide for student progress.

THE MAYOR’S OFFICE AND MEMPHIS FAST FORWARD

In 2005, the mayors of Memphis and nearby Shelby County met with leaders of Memphis Tomorrow, an association of CEOs from the city’s largest companies, to discuss the need for a regional strategy for improving the quality of life and economic growth. Memphis Tomorrow joined forces with the mayors to develop an ambitious five-year plan for job creation, a more educated workforce, and greater safety. Out of this effort came Memphis Fast Forward (MFF), a “backbone” organization that would provide the infrastructure for five major city-improvement initiatives. MFF is overseen by a cross-sector senior-level Steering Committee (co-chaired and administered by staff of Memphis Tomorrow and the mayors’ offices). Each of the five initiatives has its own governance structure and “backbone” organization to coordinate among the various community partners. For the education and talent initiative, the PeopleFirst Partnership facilitates the “cradle-to-career” agenda, in which one of four major goals is to increase the number of adults that have earned degrees or certifications that prepare

“You can’t move education along if you don’t also deal with neighborhood safety...you can’t have economic development and jobs if you don’t manage the workforce.”

— Community leader, Memphis Tomorrow

“Persistently low levels of educational attainment pose a formidable barrier to the regional economy’s potential to grow and diversify.”

— Focus: A Roadmap for Transforming the Metro Memphis Economy. A Metropolitan Business Plan, October 2014

them for local careers. PeopleFirst has developed specific performance metrics around this goal—the percentage of associates degrees, bachelor degrees, and certificates earned at specific local institutions—and coordinates among the many entities working on the key issues. In November 2014, the hard work came to fruition with the announcement of the Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce. This initiative connects the workforce needs of local employers with programs at area educational institutions. The Alliance is a cornerstone of a comprehensive regional economic development plan created with experts from the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Business Planning Initiative and will be led by the current president of Mid-South Community College. Only weeks later, the Alliance (together with Southwest Tennessee Community College) received a grant of nearly \$750,000 from the state’s Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) to help develop resources to provide the local workforce with “one-stop shopping” for good jobs in the region, as well as information and training leading to such jobs.

Along with PeopleFirst’s efforts comes sustained leadership from the Mayor’s Office. Not only does the mayor serve (along with the mayor of Shelby County) on the governance board for the new Greater Memphis Alliance, but both mayors also serve on the Steering Committee of Memphis Fast Forward, where they help provide political leadership for key initiatives. The Memphis mayor’s office also houses an Office of Talent and Human Capital (OTHC), one of the first of its kind in the nation, to help drive and coordinate the city’s many workforce-related efforts. The OTHC website only touches on the array of initiatives in the city, including:

- **Memphis Talent Dividend (MTD)**, a collaboration of more than 100 member organizations working to increase the number of college graduates in the Memphis region. MTD has three major goals around college access, completion, and reentry (for adult learners) that are closely aligned with those of PeopleFirst.
- **Graduate Memphis**, an MTD initiative, supports adults with some college experience in returning and completing a credential. The program features a resource center in the public library and partnerships with local colleges and universities with a commitment to offering “flexible, focused, and accelerated programs” targeted toward adults with some college experience.
- **Colleges of Memphis**, an effort under the Mayor’s Office, brings together 14 area colleges and universities to develop a regional strategy for increasing student success and degree completion.
- **Latino Student Success Network**, which strives to increase access and postsecondary success for Latino students.

Memphis’s commitment in education and talent has attracted a range of resources from across the state and nationally:

- **Lumina Foundation:** Memphis was selected as one of 20 initial communities supported by Lumina to dramatically increase the number of local residents with postsecondary credentials. Lumina has supported several of the above initiatives and brought access to resources such as:
 - **Postsecondary Success City Action Network:** a group of 15 cities working to identify and share strategies for promoting postsecondary success.
 - **Brookings Institution Metropolitan Business Planning Initiative:** “an innovative public-private approach to spurring regional

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A Regional Spotlight on Memphis, Tennessee

Educational Attainment A Statewide Goal

2010 – Governor Bill Haslam takes office and makes it clear that education and workforce development are at the top of his priority list: “We want Tennesseans working in Tennessee jobs. We want Tennesseans to have an opportunity to get a good job and, for those in the workplace, to be able to advance and get an even better job.”

2010 – Passage of the Complete College Act to increase educational attainment in the state and address policy levers for doing so.

2013 – “Drive to 55” initiative is launched with a goal of having 55% of all Tennesseans holding a college degree or certificate by the year 2025. The initiative includes three key components:

1. Tennessee Promise to fill in funding gaps (after financial aid) to pay for two years at community or technical colleges for any Tennessee high school student graduating with the class of 2015 or later.
2. Tennessee Reconnect to assist the approximately 940,000 adults in Tennessee who have earned some college credit but no degree. These adults can attend and earn a certificate at one of the state’s 27 Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) at no cost.
3. Tennessee LEAP (Labor Education Alignment Program) to ensure that higher education and industry are working together to address skill gaps in the state.

2014 – Tennessee Promise is signed into law. In its first year, applications well exceed expectations, with thousands of high school students applying for the funding and student mentoring program.

growth...that encourages data-driven, strategic initiatives to capitalize on local competitive advantages.”

- **Strong Cities/Strong Communities initiative:** Memphis was selected as one of six cities to pilot a cross-agency effort to strengthen communities by building the capacity of local governments.

MEMPHIS EMPLOYERS: How Are Local Companies Helping to Increase Postsecondary Attainment?

Business leaders in Memphis are actively engaged around issues of education and workforce development in the region and hold a key seat at the table with other community leaders in an effort to improve the city and support its residents. For example, the region has an active chamber of commerce, which has served as a lead job-retention and recruitment entity, and established a “Chairman’s Circle” in 2012 to “engage Memphis business leaders on a variety of issues that affect Memphis and the Mid-South.” While the Chamber typically represents smaller-size employers than Memphis Tomorrow (MT), the Chairman’s Circle represents more than 100 employers in the region (including many active in MT). The group’s mission is “Making Memphis Great,” and its plan for the future aligns with the other efforts discussed here: supporting improved education, retaining talent, and addressing key workforce skill gaps and needs.

While corporate leaders must be concerned with the bottom line, many recognize that what is good for the community can also be good for the company. Gary Shorb, CEO of Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, one of the largest private employers in the region, is an example. Shorb was involved early in the development of Memphis Fast Forward and now serves as the Chair for PeopleFirst, helping to drive the education and workforce initiatives forward. First Tennessee, a leading financial services company in the region, was one of the first companies to support Memphis/Shelby Achieves, a “last dollar” scholarship program (to cover any gaps after financial aid) for students going to two-year public college—not only by donating funds, but also by committing 100 employees to serve as mentors for students participating in the program. The company also goes beyond supporting the education of their employees to offer competitive scholarships for family members as well.

Local businesses and higher education leaders have also banded together to support “Finish Line Scholarships” at the University of Memphis. These

scholarships support students at the college's business school who are close to graduating but need some additional financial assistance to get them "over the finish line." Scholarships benefit students who might otherwise have to drop out, giving them an opportunity to graduate and contribute in the community as business professionals.

Focus groups and interviews with Memphis employers found that many companies describe a culture that supports education and development at all levels and, in many cases, with a specific emphasis on hiring lower-level employees and growing them within the company. As with many employers across the nation, Memphis-area companies rely on tuition reimbursement benefits and in-house training—both as benefits to attract and retain employees and as tools for developing employees. An increasing number of them, including First Tennessee, The Hershey Company, and Methodist Hospital, are beginning to shift their tuition reimbursement policies to tuition-advance policies to make continuing education more accessible for employees.

In some cases, professional growth for employees at local companies is clearly linked to specific training/education. For example, mechanical and maintenance staffs at The Hershey Company have a clear path for career advancement that is directly linked to successful completion of specific coursework. The company has worked closely with Southwest Tennessee Community College to design a tailored employee training program and create a pipeline for the skilled mechanics it needs. Unilever is another company that has heavily invested in its partnership with Southwest to train both potential employees in work readiness skills and existing workers in more advanced technical skills. The company is working with Southwest to locate training on the Unilever campus to both ensure access to new equipment and methods and for the convenience of employees. One program for multi-skilled technicians will allow current employees to work their normal shifts, then attend classroom training targeted specifically on day-to-day application of learning. Employees have a specified timeframe in which to complete the program, which offers a blend of theory and practical

Spotlight: *Made in Memphis Initiative*

Made in Memphis is a partnership between the Memphis Workforce Investment Network, the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce, the mayors of Memphis and Shelby County, and Southwest Tennessee Community College (Southwest) to create a pipeline to meet the growing hiring needs of local manufacturing companies and to ensure local job seekers have the skills needed to get hired for such positions.

At the center of the initiative is Southwest's Industrial Readiness Training (IRT) program, a four-week program to equip local job seekers with basic academic, interpersonal and workplace skills along with basic industrial skills to prepare for entry-level jobs with local companies paying a livable wage. Southwest partners with companies in a number of ways. Six local companies actually sponsor classes directly, while 20 or so additional companies (including Nike and Unilever) partner to fill entry-level jobs with IRT graduates and/or help design curriculum.

In many cases, the individuals participating in these programs—and getting hired as a result of them—previously had little hope of getting themselves on such a path. The program has been so successful that the initiative has launched an "IRT Prep" to get more individuals into the pipeline for training and employment. Southwest is so committed to the IRT program that it has made a guarantee to the Memphis Workforce Investment Network, the group which identifies IRT candidates and funds their training: graduates will secure a "livable wage" job within the first three months of successfully completing the IRT program or else WIN does not have to pay Southwest for the training. This ensures that the college is tying student success to what employers are looking for.

application. Unilever's workforce development approach is a key component of the company's strategic plan and allows it to build bench strength for its workforce at all levels.

FedEx, one of the largest companies headquartered in Memphis, offers educational assistance benefits not only to full-time employees, but also part-time employees for courses that start on, or after, an employee's date of hire. The corporation invests

Lumina Foundation Goal 2025: Promoting Postsecondary Attainment

A Regional Spotlight on Memphis, Tennessee

“Since Unilever began training its employees through Southwest, productivity has increased by 40 percent and waste has been cut in half.”

— Unilever Plant Manager,
Memphis Business Journal, May 16, 2013

heavily in an online e-learning platform managed by the SkillSoft Corporation that offers an array of flexible courses for job advancement or personal development, many of which are eligible for college credit. FedEx has negotiated agreements with nearly 20 higher education partners, including arrangements to delay billing so employees do not have to pay for courses upfront, and partners must agree to review the SkillSoft curriculum to potentially award credit where applicable. Partnerships go beyond just paying for coursework: FedEx has donated aircraft and other equipment to Mid-South Community College to allow students to train for professional licenses. FedEx also offers an in-house center for employee development, as well as a program based on the popular Six Sigma curriculum called QDM (Quality Driven Management), which allows employees to develop various levels of expertise in problem solving. As with Hershey, FedEx has been recognized for establishing clear career pathways for employees linked to training and education, a practice that has been linked to increased staff retention and satisfaction.

Buckman Laboratories, a family-owned research company in Memphis, also places significant importance on learning and education, providing academic scholarships and support not only for employees but their families as well, and articulating a set of corporate operating principles including, “That we continually strive to learn both as an organization and as individuals so that we are positioned to create value.”

Companies are also starting to reach local residents as early as high school to ensure that students are exposed to many different pathways. For students who might not believe attending a four-year college full-time is a possibility, learning about opportunities to work part-time with local manufacturing companies that may pay for part-time schooling can broaden their options. Nucor, for example, a large steel mill in the region, recognizes the importance of being cultural stewards in their community. Through the company’s Adopt-A-School program, employees serve as mentors to support the character and leadership development of local high school students and expose them to opportunities that will increase their chances of attending college and becoming productive adults. While this started out mainly as a community service activity, the company now sees it as an opportunity to expose students to career paths. Nucor also sponsors professional development week to expose students to potential career pathways and key school and workplace skills. The company currently offers internships to select students attending Southwest Community College to gain valuable work experience while attending school.

As Memphis leaders will tell you, there is more to do. Colleges nationwide wrestle with competing resources that often limit options for training and education. Companies often have challenges ensuring employees know about opportunities and feel supported within the constraints of pursuing further education, such as work schedules, family responsibilities and finances for funding coursework upfront. Establishing strong connections between higher education partners and companies take time, both to establish initial connections and to develop and maintain strong partnerships. However, amidst these challenges, the network of employers and community partners in Memphis is working together to see more individuals pursue meaningful education that can change lives.

Partnerships between Higher Education and Business: What Makes Them Work?

When John Churchill, the Executive Director of Workforce Development for Southwest Tennessee Community College (Southwest) in Memphis, talks to local companies about their training needs, they know he knows what he is talking about. Churchill spent more than 20 years working in the education and training industry for Fortune 500 companies and, most recently, as a training manager for a major steel manufacturer in Tennessee. So, when considering how Southwest can truly be a partner to local companies, he connects with local corporate leaders, and the most important thing, he says, is to listen first. Look for ways to help address the company's needs, be they small or large. Be flexible, and demonstrate a willingness to operate on the company's timeline. For example, when a local employer came to Southwest after spending two years working with another institution that wasn't able to meet its needs, Southwest—"with enough desire and creativity"—was able to go from program concept to enrolling students in a hybrid degree program in just six months.

Southwest looks to work with employers that will be true partners, not just those seeking a source of résumés. This includes a company visiting classes to observe students, providing internships, guest lecturing or, as with local company Smith & Nephew, providing up-to-date equipment for training. A feedback loop with companies is crucial, and program leaders want employers to feel open to make suggestions to curriculum and content, what is working and what isn't. This pays off for both employers and potential employees—students get to see a clear link between the effort they put into school and the companies willing to hire them, while companies get to observe potential employees interacting in a work-like setting and gauge how they might fit in and benefit the company.

Regardless of how local employers get involved, ensuring they see a return on their investment is crucial. It's important that the training program provides reliable, consistent quality, so employers can reasonably expect appropriate skills and prerequisites from new hires. This ensures that internal onboarding and training does not have to be customized repeatedly, which results in cost savings. Another way is to demonstrate behavior changes in incumbent employees who received training. Employers will know the impact training has on culture, processes, and the bottom line, which is critical when staff development dollars are tight.

Along with its Industrial Readiness Training (IRT) program (see box on page 5 for more detail), Southwest has partnered with other local employers and received major grants from the state and federal government to enhance its offerings in the technical training field. Southwest is working with companies in three business sectors including medical devices, manufacturing and logistics to help find qualified candidates and improve

skills of existing workers. The college offers partner companies a focus on "Mechatronics," which is a multidisciplinary field of engineering that includes the mechanics and electronics a maintenance person would be asked to do in a complicated manufacturing plant. The college's program in Advanced Integrated Industrial Technology offers individualized technical training with skills assessments, a hands-on lab with modern equipment, flexible semesters, flexible lab hours, and e-learning opportunities so that students can progress as quickly as their motivation spurs them to. The college is also starting small to ensure that students get individualized support and adequate time on training equipment and to ensure the college has an opportunity to learn from early experiences with employers and tweak programs accordingly.

Southwest has found that participant selection matters a great deal, and it has partnered with the Memphis Workforce Investment Network (WIN) to identify candidates most likely to succeed. The college collaborates not only with local employers and WIN, but also with other local community colleges—and is attracting significant federal resources that allow institutions to share resources and create regional program offerings. For example, a partnership between Southwest and Mid-South Community College (called the Greater Memphis Workforce Development Institute) builds on each institution's strengths and weaknesses to share resources to reach a larger audience of employers and students in the region. Another effort is the Mid-South Manufacturing/Distribution Training and Education Institute, which closely aligns with the Greater Memphis Chamber Chairman's Circle and focuses on advanced manufacturing. Most recently, Southwest was part of a consortium of organizations that received an \$8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to help the long-term unemployed in Memphis find good-paying jobs in high-skills industries, through advanced job training, coaching, and other services. \$1.65 million of the grant is funding a collaboration between Southwest, Mid-South, and other local institutions to provide noncredit training in the manufacturing, transportation, and logistics sectors.

Southwest grasps the important role a community college plays in supporting the community and getting local residents on the path to good jobs, and it seeks to work with—and encourage—companies to also recognize their key roles as community supporters. IRT and other programs have worked with WIN to target residents from underserved neighborhoods for participation in these training opportunities. The college is now finding that success for these students can be contagious—as more people from their own neighborhood are succeeding, they are able to start providing a support network for others in their community, both while in the programs and then out in the workplace. As one college leader said, "This is not changing people's lives, it is changing generations' lives."

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