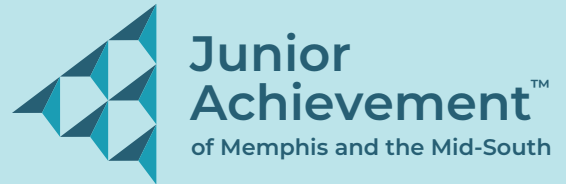


IMPACT REPORT



WINTER 2024

DEAR FRIEND,

I don't think we give our children enough credit.

As a longtime classroom teacher and leader of an organization that focuses on making sure ALL children are ready to choose the future they want, it hurts to admit that. But it's true: **We sometimes behave as if we don't think our children are able to see the future and care about it.** In fact, I think we assume that they don't. Or can't.

We're wrong about that. How do I know? As CEO of Junior Achievement of Memphis and the Mid-South, I know a lot about how children think about their future, starting as young as kindergarten.

Yet, I've noticed that when we talk about workforce development, mostly we just leave children out of the conversation. That's a huge mistake, both for our children and for the future of our region.

We must find ways to show our children that they matter and that they can be successful right here. They need to know about – and be excited about – the opportunities available to them.

That's exactly what Junior Achievement programs are designed to do: show our children their future and prepare them to choose their own pathway to success.

Inside this report, you'll find data and stories from just one of our best-in-class work readiness programs: **JA Inspire Career Exploration**. Last spring, hundreds of middle schoolers (above) had hands-on opportunities to learn about jobs in the region. Also inside, visionary conversations with regional leaders of K-12 workforce development.

Junior Achievement is eager to take our place at every table where workforce development is on the agenda. **Because it's up to us to give our children the information – and the credit – they deserve.**

Sincerely,

Leigh Mansberg

LEIGH MANSBERG
President & CEO



JA INSPIRE CAREER EXPLORATION 2024

Hands on, minds open

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS
124

TOTAL SCHOOLS
33

TOTAL STUDENTS
1,886

TOTAL EXHIBITORS
43

TOTAL JOURNEYS
5

Farm to Table

What's Next

Studio to Stadium
26%

Injury to Rehab
25%

Design to Production
24%

Students' favorite journeys



What the Students Said

1,788 completed our survey:

86% absolutely or mostly agreed that they got a chance to learn about a new career.

80% absolutely or mostly agreed that they felt prepared to interact with professionals from different industries at JA Inspire.

64% absolutely or mostly agreed that they recognized a career choice that matched their skills and interests.

71% absolutely or mostly agreed that JA Inspire helped them understand possible career choices in the Memphis/Mid-South region.



Students getting their act together onstage at the mobile version of the Overton Park Shell, part of Studio to Stadium.



Learning about clean energy technology jobs from RWE, part of Design to Production.

“ We have to build a foundation for workforce education, beginning in kindergarten, and remember that teachers are the first guides on a child’s workforce journey. It’s a matter of hope, because middle school is when children realize the opportunities they don’t have.”
 – Kesha Ivy, Chief Academic Officer, Junior Achievement of Memphis and the Mid-South

“ This was by far the best expo we’ve attended. My students were very engaged; the representatives were interactive. Everyone had a wonderful time learning via engagement and visual aids.”
 – Grandview Heights Middle School teacher

“ The energy and excitement of the students at JA Inspire is what drives innovation. To watch them pull their friends into the RWE booth and say ‘Look at how this works!’ while hooking up a solar panel or powering up a wind turbine speaks directly to their interest in clean technology. We are proud to have been a part of this amazing event and to build awareness around clean energy and the jobs transforming the energy industry.”
 – Alexis Bowman, Project Manager, RWE, WR Graceland Solar Project

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MARK HERBISON AND DR. LANCE EVANS SHARE

Regional workforce #goals



Mark Herbison

No one has to convince Mark Herbison of the power of showing children various career options early. As the president of the Tipton County Community Development Council and a longtime workforce development expert, he has been instrumental in changing attitudes and opportunities for children from rural West Tennessee.

“It used to be that students didn’t start thinking about careers until 11th or 12th grade,” he said, **“but now it’s important to be ready by the 8th**

It’s impossible not to feel the urgency Dr. Lance Evans, the State Superintendent of Education in Mississippi, has about getting Mississippi students ready for careers long before they graduate from high school. Specifically, careers in Mississippi. **“My goal is to get them to stay, or to come back and give back to the community that built them,”** he said.

Dr. Evans has experienced all kinds of opportunities in Mississippi, from high school in his hometown of Mantachie, to earning his associates degree from Ittawamba Community College, his bachelors from Mississippi State, his masters from Ole Miss and his doctorate from Delta State. He served as a teacher, coach and principal and was superintendent in New Albany. That’s why it drives him crazy

grade, so that when they get ready to go to high school, they set up a curriculum for themselves that builds in specific workforce education.”

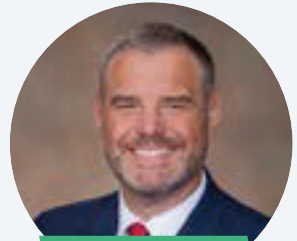
He points out that high school careers now often focus on dual enrollment, courses that lead to certifications or credits so that when students graduate from high school they can go directly to work with no debt, or “have a big chunk of their higher ed taken care of,” said Herbison. These programs have grown exponentially, he said. “We used to see just a few children participate; now it’s hundreds. We’re seeing students really starting to take advantage.”

when some workforce experts underestimate his students’ ability to choose the right path.

“We’ve got to give our students some credit,” he said. “As they evolve throughout the K-12 span, it’ll become clearer what they want to do in the end.”

That’s why career coaches are so important. “People didn’t really understand their importance in the beginning, but the planning process and the exposure needs to start early.”

For Dr. Evans, exposure – to coding, maker spaces and different career opportunities – is everything. **“You begin to see the world differently,” said Dr. Evans. “It changes the way you think.”**



Dr. Lance Evans