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**Working for Arkansas:
preparing Arkansans for
jobs and economic opportunity**

*The fourth in a series exploring
issues from ARCF's
Aspire Arkansas report.*



People with disabilities receive job training, life skill lessons and employment at Howard County Children's Center in Nashville, Arkansas.

Training For More Than a Job

by Julie Johnson Holt

Bill celebrated his 20th year working for Kroger and bought a condo. "Martha" made company history when she was promoted to supervisor. "Marie" beamed during formal remarks at a banquet about the self-worth she gained from her job at Chick-fil-A.

Bill, Martha and Marie all have disabilities, so these events are more remarkable than you might first think. What's more, their success stories were fueled by the job training opportunities specifically designed to help people with disabilities live more independent, productive and satisfying lives.

Disabilities in Arkansas

About 20 percent of the U.S. population deals with a disability of some sort, according to the U.S. Census. In Arkansas, the percentage is higher. The 2010 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey found that 26.7 percent of adults in the state have some type of disability.

Helping to drive those percentages so high is the fact that the term "disabilities" covers a lot of ground. "A lot of people think of one kind of disability — someone in a wheelchair or someone with a mental illness," explained Scott Holladay, who, through his work

with the National Academy for State Health Policy has had a good deal of involvement with adult services in Arkansas, including those for people with disabilities.

Holladay said the term "disabilities" applies to a wide variety of people who may have physical disabilities — including injuries that prevent continuation on long-held jobs — intellectual disabilities or emotional disabilities. Being able to obtain and hold a job proves vital not just financially for individuals with disabilities, but for their mental health and emotional wellbeing as well, say Holladay and others who work with people with disabilities. That's why job training geared to their needs is so important.

Two Approaches to Job Training

Two main approaches exist when it comes to teaching job skills to individuals with disabilities. The more traditional "sheltered workshops" both train and employ people with similar disabilities, usually at a single location. The more recent "supported employment" model seeks to place individuals with disabilities in mainstream employment situations.

This latter model is more prevalent in other states than it is in Arkansas, Holladay said, despite research pointing to advantages in the mainstreaming approach. Yet, Arkansas can boast of good examples of both models.

Howard County Children's Center, Nashville

For example, the nonprofit Howard County Children's Center serves adults with intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism and epilepsy. Because most of its clients are unable to drive, Howard County Children's Center runs a bus 400 miles a day to bring them to the Nashville campus 255 days a year for job training, life skill lessons and employment.

According to assistant director Rose Ray, the 130 adult clients spend half of each day in the adult development center learning daily living skills such as money management and cooking. They also exercise, practice socialization skills and research and report a current event to their peers.

They spend the other half of the day on the job. Clients are trained by one of the many onsite staff members to perform jobs that match their abilities, and job support continues throughout clients' employment.

The center offers a variety of paying positions, including tying knots and threading engines for a local weed eater manufacturer, packaging ingredients for a Hot Springs entrepreneur, loading and unloading cardboard for the center's recycling operation or working in its recently opened restaurant, The Kitchen Table. "The restaurant's worked out really well," Ray said. "Some clients who were introverted have just blossomed."

Though one or two clients have moved on to work at other places of employment, most stay at Howard County Children Center for years, sometimes until they reach age 65. "Not very many could go into the community and work," Ray said, due to a dearth of employment opportunities, a lack of transportation and the nature of their disability.

Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, Little Rock

In southwest Little Rock, the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind also has a mission of training and employing the disabled. According to human resource



"We provide a job coach to teach the client how to do the job thoroughly."

**— Pam Bland,
First Step, Inc.**





manager Brandy Johnson, Lighthouse operates somewhat as a hybrid of the sheltered workshop and supported employment models.

For one thing, not all persons employed there are blind or visually impaired, though at least 75 percent are by mandate of the organization's mission. Second, almost all employees are trained to function at performance levels demanded by other operations.

"We want to show that blind or visually impaired persons can go work anywhere on an independent basis," Johnson said. "One of our employees could easily transfer from here to Kroger or from here to Acxiom."

For many of its 130 employees, Johnson said, Lighthouse is their first place of employment. Even those who arrive with a resume often lack manufacturing experience. Therefore, on-the-job training is a must.

"We begin as soon as they start, and there are certain metrics they have to hit before we turn them loose on a machine by themselves," Johnson said. "If they can't do a job, then we try to fit their needs to another job within the facility." Daily tasks in the large, airy and light-filled warehouse range from sewing to bar coding. Recently, Lighthouse added a call center to provide another job track.

Each month, Lighthouse, which is largely self-supporting through the sale of its paper and textile goods, fills a number of government contracts, including battle dress T-shirts for the U.S. Navy and ammunition pouches for the U.S. Army. It also supplies paper products for various government agencies, and the "Skil-Craft" brand manufactured there can even be found in local office supply stores, Johnson said.

First Step, Inc., Hot Springs

Meanwhile, the supported-employment model operates in full force at First Step, Inc., in Hot Springs, and it has since the mid-1980s.

"It's pretty simplistic," say executive director Pam Bland. First Step "goes out and finds or develops a job specifically for an individual," who could be a client with cerebral palsy or an intellectual disability.

"We promise the employer they will not be harmed" by hiring First Step clients, she said. "We provide a job coach to teach the client how to do the job thoroughly, and that job coach will follow up for up to 20 percent of the time for the length of employment." That means a client in a 40-hour per week job will be supported by his or her job coach for up to eight hours each week. "We will continue to teach no matter how long it takes," and only begin to cut down hours after full proficiency is achieved, Bland said.

Chick-fil-A, Wendy's, Kroger and T.J. Maxx are a few of the companies that have worked well with – and benefited from – First Step, according to Bland. Employers have gained "some of the best employees in terms of kindness, dependability, willingness to work, attitude," she explained. But, more importantly, supported employment proves to be life changing for her clients.

Take "Marie," the young woman addressing First Step's recent banquet. She told the diners that she used to live in an institution, then a group home, then got a job with Chick-fil-A and now lives in her own apartment. "Now I'm a person!" Marie exclaimed enthusiastically. But that wasn't all. Marie had one more thing to tell the group before she took her seat — "Eat more chicken!"



The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce identified five technical training pathways available to educate and train Americans for jobs that pay a middle-class wage but do not require a bachelor's degree: associate's degrees, employer-based training, industry-based certifications, postsecondary certificates and apprenticeships.

ARKANSAS VIEWPOINTS

How can employers and educators work together to build workforce readiness in Arkansas?



By Nicholas A. Brown
*President & Chief Executive Officer,
Southwest Power Pool, Inc.*

Simplify put, we must increase the college student pipeline in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) by focusing our attention on attitudes toward these subjects in grades K-6. Regardless of the study you reference, Arkansas is last or near last in the percent of population with college degrees – less than 20 percent. Of the college students who have a goal of a STEM degree, 60 percent will graduate with a non-STEM degree.

So what should we do?

First, we need to expand programs like Girls of Promise, which introduces eighth-grade girls to STEM careers and women role models at a critical time in their development.

Second, companies should take more active roles in supporting programs that encourage STEM initiatives with younger students. This support should be financial as well as personal. Let's get some of our best and brightest employees out of the office and being a part of the process to encourage young people.

Finally, we must make a concerted effort individually and as institutions (business, media and schools) to change the cultural mindset that STEM classes aren't cool and that they are hard. That attitude must change, and it has to be attacked in grades K-6. It's simply too late in high school or even middle school, where drop-out rates in STEM are high due to peer pressure and a lack of preparation.



Arkansas ranks second in the nation on the "transitions and alignment" index of Education Week's *Quality Counts 2013* report. This index tracks state policy efforts to coordinate and connect education from K-12 through college and into the workforce.



By Sally Carder
*President,
National Park Community College*

The economic stability of any region is directly proportional to the talent and ability of its greatest resource: its "workforce." Both educators and employers must identify economic growth as the common denominator that results in a mutual benefit for everyone in the region. To carry this step further, civic and governmental leaders must also embrace this philosophy in order to support the efforts of attracting industry and providing a well trained workforce.

1. Educators must lose that elitist, philosophical attitude of supremacy and work toward creating a relationship built on respect and mutual understanding of strengths and abilities.
2. The educational institution must shift its focus from educating the masses to improving the skills and employability of individuals, thereby improving the economic talent of a region. The college must see itself as a major player in economic growth and not merely as a bystander. It must be willing to dedicate all possible resources in response to industry training needs, minimizing the red tape of bureaucracy and time consuming protocol.
3. Employers must be willing to dialog about demand job skills needed. They must also be willing to provide resources to assist in the training process. Technical training is high-cost compared to soft skills instruction. In a time when states are cutting dollars in higher education budgets, the funding requirements for workforce readiness is strangling colleges and universities.

Economic growth, providing jobs and training workers is everyone's responsibility. The success of any region depends upon trust, respect and collaboration. As educators and employers, we must appreciate the unique part that each group plays and invest in our future by building and sustaining strong partnerships.

5 Steps to College Retention

As students increase their skills and earning potential, they also increase the economic viability of the communities they call home. We each have a stake in ensuring that more Arkansans enter and complete higher education programs. To find out how schools and communities can boost retention and help students attain degrees, we sought input from several sources.

Dr. Steven Murray, chancellor of Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas (PCCUA), explained some of the steps that helped PCCUA double its three-year graduation rate in recent years. Dr. Carol Compas, program director of Arkansas Partners in Long-Term Care, and Lisa Ferrell, discretionary grant program manager for the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, explained some of the measures being taken by a coalition working to address a projected shortage of highly trained nurses in Arkansas.

1 Change the Culture. Phillips Community College's approach to retention started with a shift in campus culture. At the 30,000-foot level, teachers and administrators began year-long book studies to gain a better understanding of complicated issues like race and poverty and their relationship with students' college experiences. "The year was transformational for us as a college," Murray said. At the ground level, the college began making small policy shifts that incentivized positive student behavior. For example, they implemented a requirement for students to meet with an academic advisor before picking up their Pell Grant reimbursement checks. "It tripled the contact between students and advisors at virtually no cost to the institution," said Murray.

2 Bring the Classroom to the Students. For students with limited educational opportunities in their hometown, traveling to classes in another town or moving closer to a college or university may be a significant hardship. To train more highly qualified nurses in Arkansas, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences is partnering with Area Health Education Centers around the state to offer distance learning

classes for registered nurses seeking to earn a bachelor's degree. "They can stay in their home community and continue to work in their home community," explained Ferrell. Other four-year institutions across the state are also developing similar programs.

3 Serve the Whole Student. "We discovered that approximately 35 percent of [the certified nursing assistants, licensed practicing nurses and registered nurses] we surveyed stated computer access was a barrier to education," said Compas.

Additional barriers included tuition, work schedules, childcare and transportation. The coalition working to address Arkansas's nursing shortage recognized that often, it's not what happens inside the classroom but outside the classroom that keeps students from achieving a degree. Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, new funding is available to help students struggling with non-academic needs. Although Phillips Community College serves a different student population, many of the barriers to education are the same for their students. One strategy they're implementing is a broader student orientation class addressing these outside-the-classroom needs through instruction in conflict resolution, financial literacy, goal setting and planning.

4 Provide a Mentor. Without a support network cheering them on, students may be less likely to bounce back from setbacks in their academic journey. At PCCUA, student success coaches track progress and advocate for students during their first two semesters of school. "If a student begins to be absent from class the early alert system kicks in," explained Murray. "The student success coach is contacted, and he/she tracks down the student and tries to figure out what the issue is." Arkansas Partners in Long Term Care has also instituted a mentoring program for candidates seeking to increase their nursing education. "We fully understand unplanned life situations occur, and the mentor program is meant to help keep these students on track," said Compas.

continued on page 9

Arkansans Build Partnerships to Prepare Workforce for Today's Economy

By Governor Mike Beebe

I was recently asked if it is possible that we are over-emphasizing the importance of a post-high-school education. The answer to that question was an emphatic "no." None of us can underestimate the impact of higher education on the future of our state.

After years of lagging at or near the bottom of every measurable category in education, Arkansas has made advances being noticed across the country. In the past 10 years, we've made tremendous progress in early-childhood education and academic performance accomplishments by teachers and students in the K-12 system.

But we are far from where we need to be, especially in higher education. Arkansas students still lag behind most states in obtaining college degrees. If we remain at this slow pace, Arkansas's workforce will not be fully ready and equipped to compete in the global job market.

The first step in improving educational attainment is to understand the opportunities available. Arkansans of all ages can pursue many avenues to advance their education and obtain better jobs. Post-secondary education includes pursuing a two- or four-year college degree, as well as job-specific training and certification programs offered through Arkansas's two-year colleges and vocational schools.

Once the opportunities are understood, that is when our true work begins.

In 2008, I brought together 1,400 education, government, and business leaders from every Arkansas county to discuss the role communities must play in preparing our workforce for the 21st-century economy. We placed particular emphasis on the need for these leaders to develop strong partnerships within their cities and counties. We asked them to work toward a shared vision that would inform and inspire more people to enter the world of post-secondary education. We encouraged community leaders to raise the standards of expectation in their schools to ensure that their students are informed, inspired and prepared for the world of higher education and their desired careers. Some communities have already done just that.

- We know of communities holding regular meetings among business leaders, school leaders and elected officials. The

strong partnerships built among these sectors will help direct the future of Arkansas's cities and towns.

- We've seen business executives become role models in our secondary schools, providing job-shadow days and internships that motivate students in particular career fields.
- Many companies are inviting students to tour their facilities and see the career possibilities that await them, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Many two-year colleges and local chambers of commerce are providing direct support to Career Exploration classes in our middle schools. These students explore the world and begin planning their own future through Arkansas's College & Career Planning System, an online career-planning tool. The stories of student engagement have been encouraging.

For those communities that have not yet accepted the challenge, it's not too late. The tools are available, but they must be utilized. Nobody can create your future for you. There are cities willing to share their success stories of community assessment, planning, and execution by leaders with a new vision for a stronger future — communities like Conway, Helena, Arkadelphia, El Dorado and more. They are leading the way, creating a highly skilled workforce that has already attracted new jobs and expanded existing operations.

These partnerships have the potential to build strong communities for Arkansas families. Moving our hometowns and Arkansas forward should always be our ultimate goal.



Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe



The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative offers support services for low-income parents seeking higher education at 25 community colleges and technical centers across the state. Participants can qualify for assistance with tuition, school books, transportation, childcare and more.



Andre O'Neal, production supervisor at Goodwill Industries of Arkansas and graduate of Goodwill's Transitional Employment Opportunities program.

A Second Chance for Job Success

For Arkansans who have been incarcerated, the clock starts ticking the moment they leave prison. On top of immediate needs like food, shelter and transportation, many must also begin paying court-mandated fines and penalties. Without a steady source of income, their odds of re-offending and returning to prison increase. It's a catch-22: finding a job is critical to staying out of prison, but having been previously incarcerated makes it tough to find a job.

That's the challenge a new initiative from Goodwill Industries of Arkansas is working to solve. Most people know Goodwill through its thrift stores, but the organization's broader mission is to help people overcome barriers to employment. Revenues from its stores and donations fund job training and placement programs for people

with disabilities, those who lack job skills or education and people with a history of incarceration. Piloted in 2009, the Transitional Employment Opportunities (TEO) program offers a transitional part-time job at a Goodwill processing center or store, intensive one-on-one career coaching and support services to help men and women coming out of prison or jail gain the skills they need to get back on their feet.

"When we first started TEO, we thought, 'We want to provide men and women jobs to remove their employment barriers,'" said Staci Croom-Raley, Goodwill's vice president of workforce services. "But it became clear within the first year how important it was for them to learn about resources in the community and to be able to navigate and access other support services."

When former prisoners enter the TEO program, they become a part of a network of supportive peers and mentors preparing them for success. "They are accountable for their own actions, but they're also accountable to their TEO team," Croom-Raley said. TEO's career coaches emphasize interpersonal workplace skills like punctuality, conflict resolution and working effectively with a manager or supervisor.

The program actively moves clients toward a permanent job, supporting them through the job search with resume services, interview role play and a clothes closet for interview-appropriate work-wear. "We also help in other areas of their life where they need support — childcare services, access to housing or transportation — learning to navigate through the services available to them is critical to their acclimation back into the community," Croom-Raley added.

Andre O'Neal, a production supervisor at Goodwill's new outlet center on Scott Hamilton Road in southwest Little Rock, graduated from the TEO program last fall. "It's a tight-knit community where if you have problems, you can talk to people. It's a family outside of a family, really," he said. Andre's role at the outlet center is to oversee the processing of incoming and outgoing donations as they are shipped out to retail stores or sorted for recycling. Having seen the benefit of Goodwill's career services first-hand, he's a compelling advocate for the organization's mission: "We help individuals that come off the street. The donations that come in help other people get jobs, education and life skills. It's helping folks, and that's what I like," he explained.

Approximately 150 clients have benefitted from the program in its first three years, and of those, only four percent have re-offended. In Central Arkansas, 82 percent of TEO clients were employed after finishing the program, and in Northwest Arkansas, 62 percent were. (This difference is somewhat attributable to additional job opportunities at new Goodwill stores in central Arkansas.) Croom-Raley is proud of the program's early success, but acknowledges the need for expansion. "In Pulaski County, we know there are over 1,500 people returning to our community every year," she said. "Expanding our program will create more opportunities for men and women in need."

Numbers aside, for Andre O'Neal, the greatest measure of the program's impact is written on the faces of his loved ones: "My greatest appreciation is respect from my family and my kids. Every time I see them smile and they tell me 'good job,' that means more than you can imagine."



Visit www.arcf.org for more photos and details on TEO and other workforce training programs in Arkansas.

Incentives for Employers

The goal of Goodwill's TEO program (and other re-entry programs like it) is to place people leaving prison into permanent jobs where they can be self-sustaining. "We will do our part to prepare them, but we also have to have employers who are willing to take a chance hiring these men and women," said Goodwill's Staci Croom-Raley.

Fortunately, several incentives are available for employers willing to hire workers with a history of incarceration.

- **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)** — Coordinated through the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, WOTC is a federal tax credit for employers who hire targeted groups of people, including veterans, ex-felons and food stamp recipients. Croom-Raley says Goodwill's staff can help employers navigate the application process and locate qualified employees.
- **Federal Bonding Program** — A program of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Federal Bonding Program provides insurance to protect employers against employee dishonesty, in order to reduce the risk of hiring a hard-to-place job seeker.

Interested employers can contact Goodwill for work-ready job seekers with Goodwill's support to help them be successful.



If You're Passionate about Education

If your charitable goals include supporting your alma mater or increasing educational attainment in your community, establishing a scholarship might come to mind first. But did you know there are a variety of other important ways you can partner with Arkansas Community Foundation to leave a charitable legacy and have a greater impact in the area of education?

Your options include:

- An education fund to provide **trips for local students to visit colleges**. Many students never have the opportunity to leave their hometown or visit a college campus. Your fund can help to ensure that students in your area have a chance to expand their horizons.
- A fund to **support an academic department** at a college or university. The practical experience and enrichment students receive outside the classroom can make the difference when it comes time to find a job. You can provide a source of funding for student-led research projects, externships or opportunities to attend academic conferences.
- A library fund to **purchase new books (or e-books)** for your local high school, college or university's collection.
- A literacy fund benefitting organizations that **help adults improve their reading skills**, learn English as a Second Language or earn a GED.
- A support fund for student success initiatives that **provide at-risk students with mentoring**, academic coaching and other interventions to help them stay in school and achieve a degree.



While a scholarship can have some impact in the life of a single individual, some donors desire for their gift to reach a broader number of students. As you investigate what kind of gift you will make, consider where the greatest needs in your community lie, what other funding is available for the needs you identify and how you can structure your gift to create the greatest benefit to your community.

Arkansas Community Foundation has 37 years of experience with a variety of educational funds and can help you understand all of your options. Contact Kim Evans, Vice President of Development and Client Services, at kevans@arcf.org or 501-372-1116.



In 2009, people with professional degrees earned, on average, four times as much as people with only a high school degree.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey

5 Steps to College Retention, continued from page 5

5 Create the Expectation of Success. Through the Great River Promise program, Phillips Community College made a promise to every local student: those who graduate from high school and meet minimum attendance and behavior standards can go to PCCUA for free. Starting in third grade, college

representatives visit children in their classrooms to tell them about the Promise and encourage them to achieve. "We give them Great River Promise temporary tattoos to wear home. We take pictures of them dressed in caps and gowns. We're trying to create the expectation of going to college for all of the students in our community," Murray said.

Is Your Local Workforce Ready?

Projections from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce suggest that by 2018, 63 percent of job openings will require at least some education beyond high school. In order for Arkansas's communities to be ready to attract employers — and for individual Arkansans to secure their economic future — we need strong pathways to higher education.

In Arkansas Community Foundation's *Aspire Arkansas* report, released in May 2011, we identified seven goals for Arkansas's communities and looked for data that shows how each of our communities are faring with regard to each goal. Below are maps from the report addressing

workforce development issues — educational attainment and median household income.

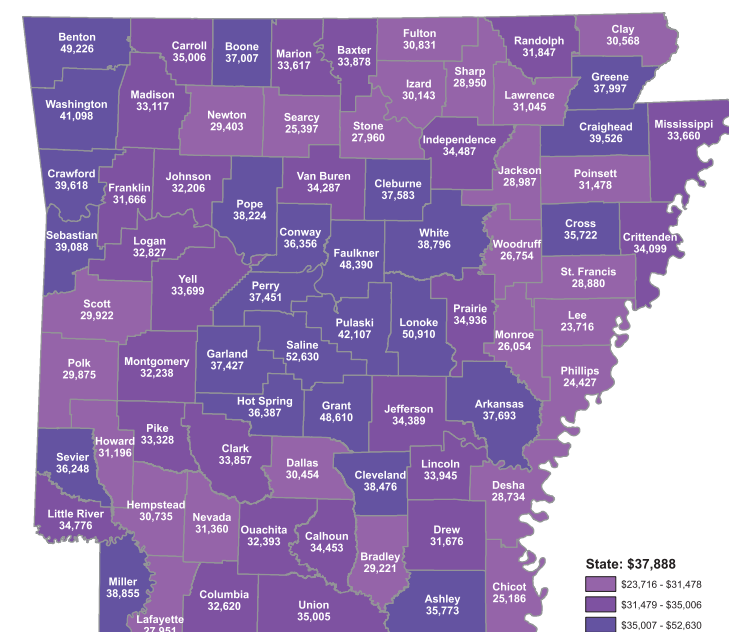
Use these maps to help compare your county to others across your region and the whole state so you can start the conversation in your community about how to move the numbers in the right direction.

For additional data on workforce readiness and historical trends for your county visit www.arcf.org/AspireArkansas.



median HOUSEHOLD INCOME

by County; 2009

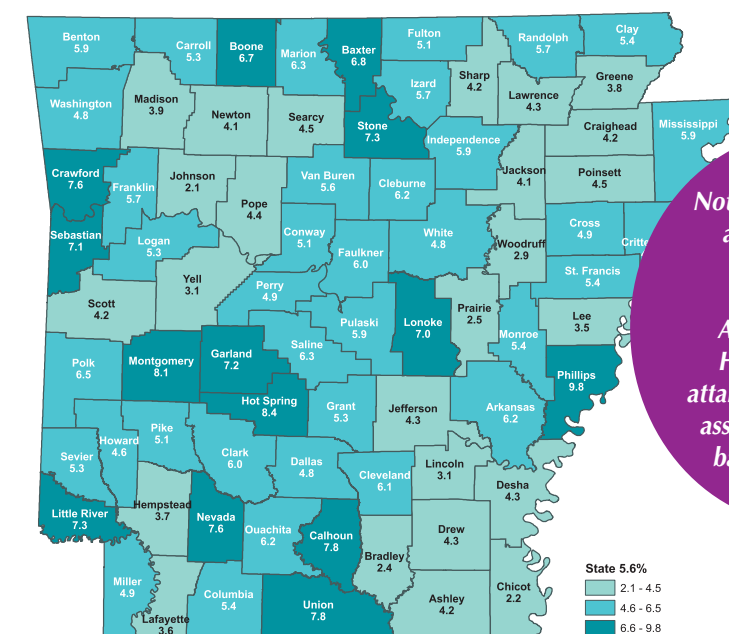


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, Release Date: December 2010

associate's DEGREE

Percent of Population 25 Years and Older with Associate's Degree, by County; 2005-2009

Educational attainment: highest level of education completed.

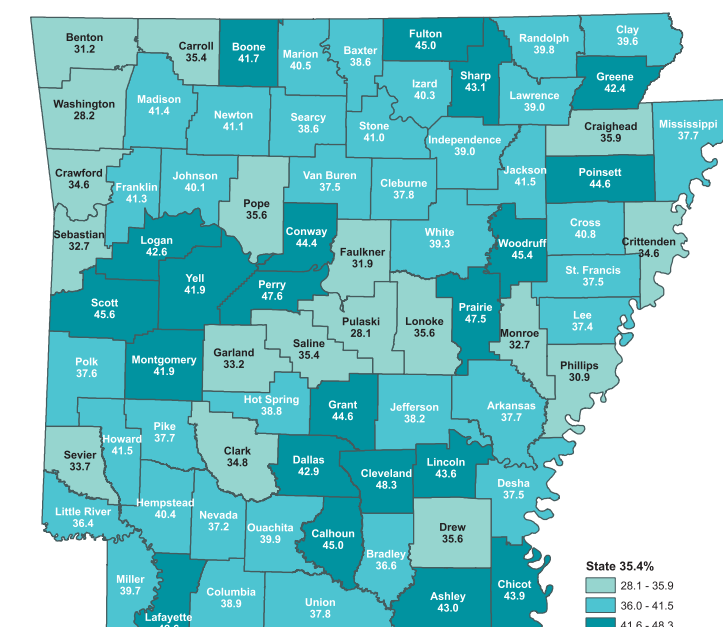


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey

high SCHOOL

Percent of Population 25 Years and Older with High School Diploma or GED, by County; 2005-2009

Educational attainment: highest level of education completed.

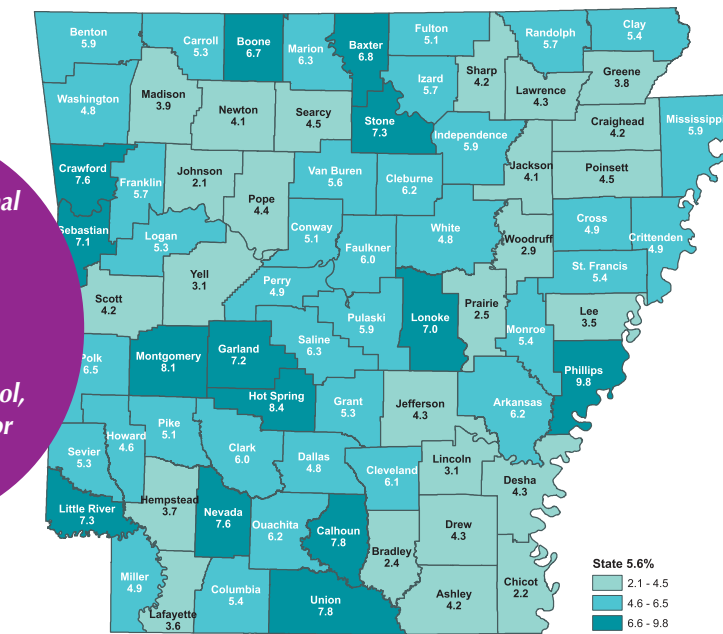


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey

associate's DEGREE

Percent of Population 25 Years and Older with Associate's Degree, by County; 2005-2009

Educational attainment: highest level of education completed.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey

Note that educational attainment rates represent the percentage of Arkansans whose HIGHEST degree attained is high school, associate's degree or bachelor's degree.



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Inside *ENGAGE*

We've included a copy of Arkansas Community Foundation's 2012 Annual Report in this month's edition of *ENGAGE* magazine.

See the FY2012 Annual Report — Arkansas Community Foundation is helping build community throughout the state with programs like a new home for healthcare in Clark County, an economic restart for the Delta focused on technology education, a leadership program to build character in a Pine Bluff elementary school and more. Take a look at the ARCF financials, and meet our statewide staff.

ENGAGE in Workforce Development — "People will have education and training needed to compete in today's economy." The workforce training aspiration from the *ARCF Aspire Arkansas* report is at the core of this February issue of *ENGAGE*. Read how Arkansans with special needs receive training on **page 1**. Find out how educators and employers view collaboration to build a better workforce in our View-points columns on **page 4**. Learn how Goodwill Industries of Arkansas is supporting former prisoners as they prepare for new careers on **page 7**, and on **page 6**, read a special message on workforce development from Governor Mike Beebe.

