

# Higher Education Institutions Reengage Adult Learners to Complete Degrees

## (Re)Engage Alabama

(Re)Engage Alabama Community of Practice, a state-sponsored series of learning convenings (2022-2023), aimed to change the way four-year public higher education institutions across Alabama think about and serve adults with "some college, no degree."

The innovative Community of Practice was led by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), the state's higher education coordinating body, and Alabama Possible, the statewide nonprofit advocacy organization. Third Sector provided technical assistance to the Community of Practice.

Nine institutions from across the state came together over the course of the year to explore data and share best practices for supporting adult learners from enrollment through degree completion, culminating in the development of institution-specific action plans.



## About Adult Learners

A college degree is a key pathway to economic mobility for many Americans. There are 33.9 million working-age adults (adults between the ages of 25 and 64) with some college but no degree across the nation, including more than 390,000 in Alabama alone.

When adults with some college, no degree attempt to return to college, they often find that most higher education institutions are not designed to serve learners like them.

Embracing adult learners could help institutions address these challenges and stabilize enrollment.

Outcomes-focused learning communities at institutions of higher education can increase economic mobility for adult learners.

 **\$92,500**

During the 2024 spring and summer semesters, the first period during which the (Re)Engage Alabama Grant was available, **37 individuals received grants**, representing an investment of **\$92,500 in scholarships for adults with some college, no degree**.

 **67%**

**All nine participating institutions have introduced or strengthened direct programs, services, and supports for adult learners.** In addition, many have implemented specific solutions from the action plans they created at the conclusion of the (Re)Engage Alabama convenings.

 **77%**

ACHE and Alabama Possible advocated for and secured additional funds from the state legislature to establish a dedicated grant program for adult learners. As a result, the state approved the **(Re)Engage Alabama Grant Program (S.B. 175)**, which allocated a **\$4.5 million supplemental appropriation in 2023 and another \$4.5 million in 2024**.

## Community Voice



"Returning to school as an adult learner was a big decision for me, but it's been really rewarding. I work full-time for the government, and a lot of the jobs require education to boost your chances of getting into higher-paying roles.

That's really important to me. Going back to school will help me move up a little higher on the job brackets when I apply. Plus, my daughter graduated from Jacksonville State University, and seeing her succeed inspired me even more—I wanted to earn my degree, too!

Now, I'm on track to graduate in May 2026 with my degree. It's been a challenging journey, but I feel like I'm setting an example for others, showing them that it's never too late to pursue your goals."

-Tamisha Garrett, 46, a current student at Jacksonville State University pursuing a B.S. in Business Management

## Are you ready to transform how you serve adult learners?

Third Sector provides technical assistance that goes beyond changes to policies and practices and includes changes to culture and mindsets critical for sustaining long-term systems change.

- **Practices and Policies:** Third Sector contributes to increased public funding for adult learners, identifies financial barriers for underserved populations, and enhances direct outreach and communications to re-enroll student learners.
- **Culture:** Third Sector creates more open communication between state and higher education institutions, strengthens relationships, and facilitates sharing of best practices across institutions.
- **Mindsets:** Third Sector deepens stakeholders' understanding of adult learners, fosters institutional recognition of themselves as leaders in the adult-attainment space, increases buy-in from institutional leadership, and promotes recognition and prioritization of adult learners in the state.

*"I really think that the mindset shift was probably the thing that I'm most proud of because those students are now considered in most decisions that we make. ... It just really set us up for success going forward with these students, and it's not an uphill battle now. When we talk about this population of students, everyone is just very aware and focused and committed to serving these students."*

*-Jessica Wiggins, Associate VP of Enrollment Management at Jacksonville State University*

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