



Brave New South

The 2008 Report on the Future of the South

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A Project of the Council on the Southern Community

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“Interacting with Heifer International and the Clinton School of Public Service, both headquartered here, or volunteering with local social-outreach programs, Arkansas’s young people have witnessed a true partnership of government and the private sector joining together to form a powerful resource for addressing our most pressing issues. The global economy, instant news access, and the interconnectedness of the Internet place events from Beijing to Baghdad to Batesville all at the fingertips of Arkansas youth. I am very proud that our young people want to be involved and they want to make a difference. The ultimate means to continue fostering the civic engagement of our young people, both locally and internationally, is the continued pursuit of a world-class education for all of Arkansas’s young people.”

—Governor Mike Beebe, Arkansas



Introduction

I'd like for adults to know that teenagers are really motivated to change our town.

— High School student in Tahlequah, OK

I believe the lack of motivation from the youth of the community stems from the lack of trust from the adults to help the youth.

— High School student in Walterboro, SC

It's difficult to get things done unless you have been in Malvern 30 years or have gray hair.

— Forum participant in Malvern, AR

While he was a freshman at Duke University, William Hwang created InnoWorks, a nonprofit organization that helps underprivileged kids get excited about science, engineering and math. InnoWorks has nine chapters, seven of them at U.S. universities and one each in colleges in the Bahamas and Saudi Arabia. Hwang was a quadruple-major student in biomedical engineering, physics, electrical and computer engineering, and was co-editor-in-chief of Duke's Undergraduate Journal of Science and Technology He has studied as a Rhodes Scholar.¹

Lindsey Williams of St. Joseph, Missouri, designed a transverse irrigation system that doubled vegetable

crop production on her family's farm while saving significant amounts of water. The impact was so great that she soon had a surplus of vegetables. She then created Gardening for Families, which has donated over 61,000 pounds of fresh produce to needy families and has inspired others to follow in Lindsey's footsteps. She's now a sophomore at Central Methodist University.²

Demetrice Tuttle of Troup County, Georgia, was named the 2007-2008 National Youth of the Year by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. From caring for his younger brother when his mother was diagnosed with cancer to his service as a tutor and mentor for at-risk teens, Demetrice is an ideal model of an engaged Southern youth.³

William, Lindsey, Demetrice and others like them represent the South's greatest hope.

In striking contrast, the reality behind the numbers in Figure 1 represents a great fear for the region.

Figure 1 is a state-by-state mapping of those between the ages of 18-24 who are not working, not in school, and who have no degree beyond high school. A large and contiguous swath of Southern soil—Arkansas, Louisiana,

Figure 1: Percent of Youth 18-24 Not Working, Not in School, with No Degree Beyond High School in 2006⁴

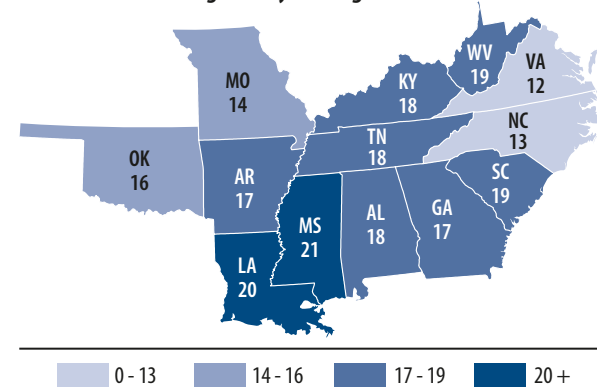


Figure 2: Percent of Youth 18-24 in Poverty in 2006⁵

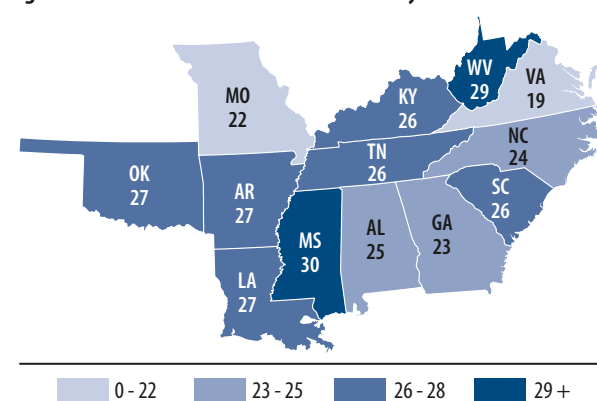




Figure 3: Rate of Teen Deaths in 2006 per 100,000⁶

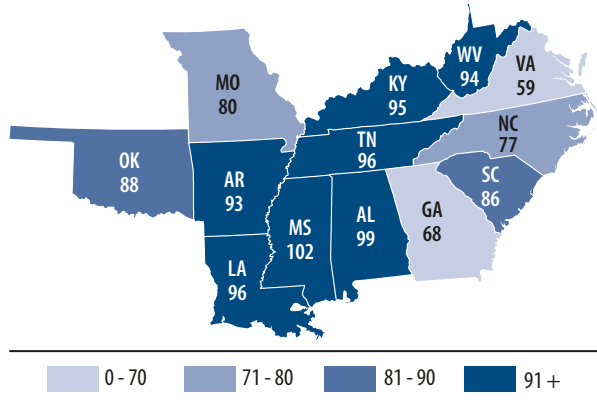
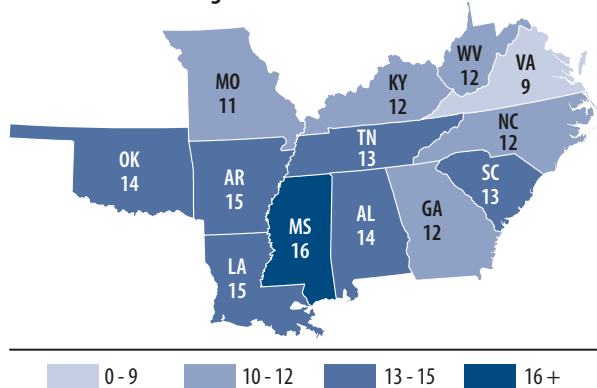


Figure 4: Percent of Births in 2004 to Females less than 20 Years of Age⁷



Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Kentucky and West Virginia—is among the worst in the nation in this at-risk category. Each of these states has at least 17 percent and as high as 21 percent of its 18-24 year-old population in jeopardy by this measure—almost one out of every five young adults.

Similar trends are found in rankings for youth in poverty, teen death rates, and births to teenagers (Figures 2-4).

2008 high school graduates were born in the year of the Gulf War, when George H. W. Bush was President of the United States. They were born the year when smoking was banned on domestic airlines and the Sandinistas were voted out of office in Nicaragua. The Hubble space telescope was launched into orbit that year. The best selling pop single was “Hold On” by Wilson Phillips, and Janet Jackson’s “Rhythm Nation 1814” topped the album charts.

This year’s high school graduates were a year old when the Soviet Union collapsed. They were three years old during the Waco confrontation and five years old when the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City was bombed. They have never known a world without the Internet and ubiquitous cellphone service. The Berlin Wall fell before they were born.

According to the UCAN (Uhlich Children’s Advantage Network) 2007 Teen Report Card, American teens gave a “C-” grade to adults and their ability to run the government. They also gave adults a “C” grade for keeping schools safe from violence and crime, and for protecting kids from gun violence overall. Moreover, the scores that adults get for fighting AIDS have grown steadily worse since 1999.⁸

What is to be done to better know and understand these young people into whose hands the future of the South will be placed? What is to be done to prepare them for current and future leadership roles?

A Ford Foundation report on youth engagement says that building the leadership capacity of young people can provide “...development of a range of skills, including critical thinking, writing, public speaking, planning, and group dynamics.” Initiatives such as Junior Achievement give practical, hands-on experience to budding entrepreneurs.⁹ Youth legislatures and similar programs help young people develop the skills that will allow them to build the civic and governmental foundations for a more fully effective democracy. The lessons learned by young people who are fully engaged allow them to make better contributions towards the future of their communities. Studies have shown that those actively engaged in their communities as youths are more likely to be involved as adults.

Research demonstrates that higher levels of youth engagement yield:

- Increased academic achievement¹⁰
- Better school attendance and lower dropout rates¹¹
- Greater awareness of career opportunities¹²
- Increased acceptance of diversity¹³
- Improved social behavior¹⁴

GRADES GIVEN BY AMERICAN TEENS TO ADULTS

- C- Ability to run the government
- C Keeping schools safe from violence
- C- Stopping young people from drinking
- C Stopping young people from using drugs
- C- Protecting the environment
- C Understanding the realities of teen sex

Source: Uhlich Children’s Advantage Network

Moreover, assigning real responsibility to young people yields tangible benefits now—new ideas, new energy, and a sense of community ownership. The community becomes “my place” instead of “my parents’ place” or “the place that I come from.”

This report was developed through a process involving Southern Growth’s Board and its standing advisory councils, with the Council on the Southern Community serving as lead advisor. A brainstorming retreat was held in Research Triangle Park and state policy dialogues were convened in five Southern states. 153 community forums were held throughout the Southern Growth region with more than 3,200 participants. And more than 530 participated in Southern Growth’s online survey.

The findings from this exhaustive listening process are detailed in the “Listening to the South” section of this report. In summary, Southerners said that South should:

- 1) Create a culture that values youth and their opinions
- 2) Provide youth with somewhere to go and something to do
- 3) Broaden the reach of youth programs, with special attention to the “lost middle”—those not classified as either high achievers or at-risk
- 4) Communicate better with youth about existing opportunities, taking advantage of new technologies
- 5) Ensure that all youth have positive role models
- 6) Engage the business community in youth development

In addition to the listening process, Southern Growth reviewed a broad range of studies and reports, identifying trends, challenges, opportunities and best practices. All of this listening, research and deliberation point to a clear

need for action on the part of Southern states and communities. Too many young Southerners are at risk for the region’s future to be secure. While educational reform and achievement remain primary concerns for Southern Growth, this report moves beyond those concerns to focus on other challenges facing our young people and on the opportunities that are available to better understand and utilize the passion, skills and talents of young Southerners.

To address these challenges, this report calls for three actions by Southern states and communities:

- 1) **ENGAGE** young people in community life.
- 2) **LISTEN** to young people, value them as a resource, and act on their ideas.
- 3) **SUPPORT** young people in developing and using their passions, talents and skills to better themselves and their communities.

Engage

The first major recommendation of this report is “ENGAGE young people in community life.” The *Engage* section of this report addresses this recommendation in detail. Six barriers to youth engagement are identified.

The first barrier is, “Young people do not know how or where to get involved.” This barrier is complicated by the changing nature of civic engagement over time. For parents, civic engagement may have been the Rotary Club or the NAACP, while for their children many of the opportunities for engagement may arise online through Facebook or other social networking sites.

The second barrier is, “Youth do not have any interest in being involved.” Even among the young people responding



to Southern Growth’s online survey, 40 percent said youth have no interest in becoming engaged in their communities. Some young people say they are discouraged from becoming involved in organizations that they perceive as boring or as dominated by adults. Another factor in this barrier is the potential mismatch of opportunity with the actual interests of young people.

The third barrier is, “Youth do not see potential opportunities as meaningful.” In Southern Growth’s online survey, adults perceived this as a more important barrier than did young participants, although both groups saw it as important.

The fourth barrier is, “Young people do not have transportation to become involved.” Lack of transportation was cited as a barrier in both small towns and large cities. It is exacerbated by the challenge of distance in rural communities and is particularly difficult for disabled youth, regardless of their location.

The fifth barrier is, “Young people are unable to become involved due to time constraints.” Jobs, homework and school activities were cited as interests competing for volunteer time.

The sixth barrier is, “Only top students are chosen.” Some students getting multiple chances to serve as President



of clubs and organizations was seen as placing limitations on the opportunity to involve more students. For each of these six barriers, strategies for overcoming the challenges are identified and successful examples are cited.

In addition, the *Engage* section offers strategies for engaging underrepresented youth. Survey respondents consistently held that their communities are not doing a good job of engaging African-American and immigrant youth, high school dropouts, disabled youth, youth not in schools and youth in foster care. Drawing on work done by the participants of the Virginia state policy dialogue, suggestions are offered for engaging each of these communities.

Listen

The second recommendation is, “LISTEN to young people, value them as a resource, and act on their ideas.” The *Listen* section of this report explores this theme in detail.

In forums and surveys organized by Southern Growth for this report, young people consistently called for better communication with adults. Adult listening skills were often called into question. Not only did young participants cry out to be heard, they said they want to be heard as individuals—not as part of a crowd, not as stereotyped youth.

Robert Epstein has written that adolescence is an “historical anomaly.” He says that “...we infantilize our young people unnecessarily and extremely, that many or most teens are capable of functioning as adults in a number of ways, and that infantilization has serious negative consequences in our society.” Epstein’s research demonstrates that the concept of adolescence is a relatively recent development. For most of history, he says, children took on adult responsibility as they were ready during the teenage years. At the very least, this work shows that there are powerful positive results to be derived from doing a better job of listening to young people.¹⁵

Roger A. Hart, co-director of the Children’s Environmental Research Group, says that opportunities should gradually increase, along with age, for children to participate in democracy. He finds that these efforts fall short and has developed a “Ladder of Youth Participation” that describes eight levels at which young people can be involved in communities. The lowest level is “manipulation,” or “adults using youth...to support causes and pretend the causes are inspired by youth.” Near the mid-point of Hart’s ladder is “assigned but informed,” where youth are “...assigned specific roles and informed about how and why they are being involved.” At the top of the ladder is the ideal, “youth-adult shared decisions,” where youth and adults “...offer and accept each other’s ideas, and young people’s input on decisions is as valued as that of the adults.”¹⁶

Of course, even when adults want to listen to and meaningfully involve young people, institutional barriers can thwart progress. In the case of schools, Adam Fletcher, founder of the Freechild Project, says that student communication can be blocked in four ways, through positions, policies, practices and procedures.¹⁷

A 2006 analysis of states’ inclusion of student voices in educational decision-making names 19 states that have “woven student voice into the fabric of their state systems.” Southern Growth member states Louisiana, Mississippi,

Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia were among the 19 states.¹⁸

In New Orleans, students are directly involved in reinventing the New Orleans public school system. Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools is built around an intensive six-week summer conference. Students have evaluated the public school system, published a book of poetry, and created a youth speakers bureau.¹⁹

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation provided seed funding for a Youth Innovation Fund supporting young people who are committed to making lasting change in their communities. A national advisory board (including young people) has helped to create and fund eight sites around the country, each with a community-wide youth board, a full-time coordinator, and a group of partner organizations. Three of these youth philanthropy sites are in the South: Cleveland, Mississippi; Nashville, Tennessee; and Hampton, Virginia.²⁰

Also in the South is the Southern Energy Network, a student- and youth-led group devoted to clean, safe, renewable energy. Active in 12 states, the group is launching sustainable energy campaigns on 25 college campuses. It intends to achieve greenhouse gas reduction plans on at least 10 campuses within three years.²¹

Other success stories in the South include the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation’s Youth Advisory Board in Kansas City, Missouri²²; the Seeds of Fire initiative in New Market, Tennessee²³; and Richmond, Virginia’s Youth Philanthropy Project.²⁴

Support

This report’s third recommendation is, “SUPPORT young people in developing and using their passions, talents and skills to better themselves and their communities.”

The *Support* section of the Report includes six recommended supportive actions from the Pew Partnership for Civic Change and five interrelated actions or promises from America's Promise Alliance.

The Pew Partnership for Civic Change list includes:²⁵

- Eliminate substance abuse
- Connect youth to adults
- Improve life skills
- Prepare students for work and college
- Encourage better life choices
- Build self-esteem

The America's Promise Alliance list advocates:

- Caring adults
- Safe places
- A healthy start
- Effective education
- Opportunities to help others

The Alliance emphasizes that “young people must experience these critical supports throughout their lives—in their families, at schools and out in their communities.”²⁶

A nationwide initiative (begun in Missouri in 1981) called “Parents as Teachers”²⁷ and a Loudon County, Virginia initiative called “Parenting with Love and Limits”²⁸ are cited as success stories for parental support. While schools are acknowledged as key players in youth development, this chapter focuses on the emerging roles of Out-of-school-time (OST) initiatives focused on alternatives to dangerous behaviors of young people.

Many OST initiatives are focused on the critical after-school hours between 3 and 6 PM when teens are more likely to

be at risk as victims of crimes, in car crashes, or even of becoming pregnant. OST practitioners have learned through experience that different approaches are needed to attract older teens and young adults than the ones that are successful with younger children. Seven guidelines for older youth programs are listed in the chapter.

Technology has also emerged as a means of attracting young people to OST initiatives. The Appalachian Media Institute is singled out as a particularly strong example.²⁹

Libraries, parks, museums and other facilities can be successfully used as OST sites. CommunityIMPACT! Nashville and that city's Adventure Science Center partnered to deliver the museum's resources to a low income neighborhood, for example.³⁰

Young people throughout the South were clear in community forums and surveys that mentoring is one of the most successful strategies for support. While there are many mentoring success stories around the nation and South, too many young people still lack positive role models. According to one survey, more than 40 percent of young people ages 8-21 say they want more adults in their lives to whom they can turn for help.³¹

A strong body of evidence has accumulated that mentoring is effective, efficient, and attractive to people across political and cultural lines. New strategies are emerging in the areas of peer mentoring, tele-mentoring, group mentoring, and open source mentoring.

The importance of providing support to young entrepreneurs cannot be understated for a region whose economy has long relied too heavily on the recruitment of branch plants as a primary economic development strategy. A Kauffman Foundation survey found that 40 percent of those between 8 and 21 have already started, or would



like to start a business.³² REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship for Action Learning) was created in North Carolina but is now providing hands-on entrepreneurship training in 43 states and foreign countries.³³ The University of South Carolina is one of several Southern campuses with a student business incubator.³⁴

With more young people declaring bankruptcy than are graduating from college, the importance of financial literacy is underscored. In a Charles Schwab youth survey, almost all American teens support living within means, but only 34 percent know how to balance a checkbook.³⁵ A number of partnerships between financial institutions and youth organizations have been created to teach young people about financial responsibility. The Youth Credit Union Program has been created by the National Federation of Credit Unions to help build financial literacy.³⁶

The Old South, the New South, and the Brave New South

It has become commonplace to acknowledge that the term and concept of “The New South” is both dated (to the 1880's) and no longer useful. Nevertheless, it remains in use as a way of convincing outsiders, and perhaps ourselves,



About this Report

that we are not the antebellum South. It is well past time to create a new image for the South, an image that is closer to reality and more in touch with our dreams and aspirations. The responsibility for giving that image substance, for making and keeping it real, rests squarely on the shoulders of young adults and those who will soon become young adults.

Older Southerners— in this case, anyone over 25— must help prepare that generation to live up to its responsibility and promise. We must... ENGAGE, LISTEN to, and SUPPORT them to strengthen the South and its communities.

In Tennyson's poetic retelling of *The Odyssey*, Ulysses addresses his crew as they prepare for the arduous journey home. "Come, my friends," he says, "It is not too late to seek a newer world."

It is also not too late to seek a newer South—a Brave New South populated, built and sustained by the region's youngest, brightest, and bravest. This report is for and about Southern youth—the real future of the South.

In 2004, Southern Growth's Report on the Future of the South focused on issues surrounding globalization. Reacting to a growing concern on the part of Board and advisory council members as well as the broader set of Southern stakeholders, a concerted effort was made to engage young Southerners in that conversation. Governor Brad Henry of Oklahoma (then Southern Growth's Chair) convened the organization's first state policy dialogue with an all-youth audience. The quality of the youth input and the level of commitment and engagement of the participants encouraged Southern Growth to more actively seek input from young Southerners.

During Southern Growth's annual conference that year, a young speaker received a standing ovation when she said, simply and emphatically, "The problem is, you don't LISTEN to us!"

When Southern Growth focused on the economic challenges of the South's rural communities in the 2005 Report on the Future of the South, one of the central themes that emerged during the process of listening to Southerners was the need for "...strategies to make rural areas attractive to young people." Community forum participants were particularly concerned with the loss of young people from rural communities.

In 2006, Southern Growth turned to innovation as the central theme for its Report on the Future of the South and annual conference. The forums and surveys conducted during the year revealed a growing concern that young Southerners were not choosing math and science-related fields and were not focusing on those subjects during their education.

And in 2007, as Southern Growth focused on building a workforce for the knowledge-based economy, concerns about dropout rates and the educational choices of young Southerners continued to resonate throughout community forums and the Board's online survey.

Coming in to this year, it seemed inevitable that Southern Growth would focus on "the *real* Future of the South": our youth. The Council on the Southern Community advanced this idea and Southern Growth's Chairman, Governor Mike Beebe of Arkansas, directed the staff to develop the 2008 Report and annual conference on this theme.

Ever since 1974, when, led by then-Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia, Southern Growth published its first Report on the Future of the South, the education of young Southerners has been a primary concern of the Board. Moreover, the level of educational achievement in the South has been consistently linked to the level of real and potential economic achievement in the region. The 1974 Report said, "...the struggle to improve standards and to make education of full benefit to our children continues." The 1986 Report said, "...we still have much to do to secure the new education that today's students will require in tomorrow's world." And the 2007 Report said, "If the U.S. is increasingly challenged in competing globally, and the South is not educationally competitive with the U.S. as a whole, then a fair assessment of the state of the Southern workforce is that of crisis."

What separates the 2008 Report from all of its predecessors is a focus on young people and their engagement in our communities rather than solely on the education of our youth or the need for specific attention to at-risk populations. What further separates this Report is its attention to the reality that young Southerners don't just represent our future, they are exceedingly valuable, but under-valued, *current assets*. The accomplishments of young Southerners profiled throughout the report clearly reinforce this position. Citing just one field, author Robert Epstein lists the remarkable contributions of young people in mathematics throughout history. For example, Blaise Pascal proved a theorem of conic sections at 16 and invented the world's first calculator at 18. Joseph-Louis Lagrange became professor of mathematics at Turin at the age of 16. Karl Friedrich Gauss developed a law of quadratic reciprocity at age 17.

When Board and advisory council members met to brainstorm the set of ideas, challenges and issues that would define this report, a great deal of attention was paid to the age group that would be the focal point of the work. Although strong cases were made to focus on all age groups down to infants and up to everyone under the age of 30, a final decision was made to focus on the generation of young people who have recently entered adulthood or will soon do so—those between the ages of 14-24.



“Since my election in 2005, tools such as YouTube and Facebook have played an increasing role in engaging young people to participate in elections. I believe this trend will continue as we see new technologies emerging that will allow young people to more easily channel their collective energy to create real and lasting change in their communities.”

—Governor Tim Kaine, Virginia