



# ***Voices of Vision:***

***Insights from Alabama's Eight Historically Black (HBCC) and Predominantly Black (PBCC) Community Colleges***

**Dr. Kathy H. Thompson**

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**ECMC**  
Foundation

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**GREAT**  
**EIGHT**

## ***The Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education (CIPE), University of South Alabama***

CIPE serves community colleges, universities, postsecondary partners, employers, and community partners to improve graduation rates and workforce outcomes for first-generation, under-represented, and under-resourced students. CIPE unifies the work of its partner communities to provide maximum benefit for participating institutions and the students they serve. CIPE assists higher education institutions in becoming more student-centered and equity-focused. CIPE catalyzes change among postsecondary institutions in digital teaching and learning, student advising, developmental education, student pathways, and capacity building, among other topics. Focusing on these objectives improves student outcomes and eliminates disparities, particularly among Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds.

Since 2015, Dr. Thompson and her team have honed their skill in creating partner communities, building consensus to articulate a shared learning agenda, and skillfully building relationships with site-facing supports and support providers. CIPE's purposeful and uniquely accomplished team is staffed by experts with the skill, knowledge, and ability to perform precisely at both the macro and micro levels. They develop unique operational service delivery frameworks for guidance, planning, strategy, and resources for partners to deploy in change management. CIPE's service deliverable supports constructs of holistic student success initiatives to serve students effectively and efficiently. The team's technical assistance enables partner institutions to build capacity by better understanding the practice of data utilization for decision-making and deploying efficiency in all-encompassing student success support.

**Dr. Kathy Thompson** is the Founding Director of the Center for Innovative in Postsecondary Education. She has over 30 years of experience in postsecondary administration, teaching, and workforce and economic development. Dr. Thompson currently serves as the Technical Assistance provider for the Lumina Foundation, Black Adult Learners Initiatives cohort of five HBCUs in North Carolina. Prior, Dr. Thompson served six years as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Intermediary for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Frontier Set. She is motivated to eliminate equity disparities in education, particularly for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds.

**Dr. Lisa Dunning**, Kaizen Education Group, has a deep-rooted passion for higher education. She served three years as a consultant on the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Intermediary Team for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Frontier Set. Dr. Dunning currently lends her expertise through technical assistance and strategic guidance to the Lumina Foundation's Adult Learner Initiative and Educause's CourseGateway Digital Learning Strategy. A significant chapter of her career includes her leadership role as the Associate Vice President for Student Success at a distinguished HBCU. Dr. Dunning's visionary thinking was instrumental in developing and implementing a newly designed academic advising framework, the cornerstone of student support systems.

**Carlisha Hartzog** is the Storytelling Team Project Manager, overseeing the project's design, management schedule, and outreach. She is the president and managing member of Hartzog Consulting, a full-service project and event management firm that integrates logistics management and communications support to support some of the world's most respected foundations, Fortune 500 corporations, and multinational enterprises. Her experience supporting higher education organizations includes engagement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities (APLU), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationally, and public and private colleges and universities. She has more than ten years of experience managing initiatives that embrace diverse populations to create equitable access to resources and opportunities.

**Candace Spencer** is a communication specialist with more than a decade of experience in higher education marketing and strategy development. Throughout her career, she has provided valuable support to numerous postsecondary institutions spanning 21 states. She offers in-depth strategy analysis, creates impactful digital and print communication materials, crafts compelling written content, delivers training sessions that are both informative and engaging, guides brand evolution, and provides recommendations to help clients stay ahead of the competition.

**Lisa Becker** is a technical writer/editor with 28 years of experience contributing to projects and workgroups, including as Contributing Writer and Managing Editor of the Storytelling Team. She served as the communications arm of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's HBCU Intermediary Team from 2018 to 2022. She is currently contracted with the NASA Shared Services Center to work with NASA senior executives in drafting career history/achievement papers and Presidential Rank Nominations for executive career advancement and recognition.

In collaboration with the ECMC Foundation, the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education (CIPE) and **Alabama Possible** are delighted to share the first of a series of case studies. The focus is on the eight Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCC) and Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCC) in Alabama, collectively known as the "Great Eight." The eight HBCCs/PBCCs are Bishop State, Chattahoochee Valley, Gadsden State, George C Wallace, H. Councill Trenholm, J F Drake, Lawson State, and Shelton State. Over the next three years, Alabama Possible will consult with the CIPE Team to create case studies highlighting the successful initiatives of various institutions in promoting student success. These studies will cover a range of topics, including Academic Advising and Workforce Development, as well as the academic experience, campus climate, leadership and culture, data utilization, and technology. The CIPE Team's Storytellers conclude the project by developing a Storytelling Playbook that outlines these institutions' unique student success practices.

**Alabama's eight** Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs) and Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs)— **known as the Great Eight**—play a vital role in advancing access and opportunity across the state. Through visionary leadership, these institutions have become gateways to higher education, engines of workforce development, and anchors of community well-being. Collectively, they generate more than **\$1.4 billion in economic impact** (Alabama Community College System, January 2025), support thousands of jobs across Alabama, and supply the state's talent pipeline in high-demand sectors, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, public service, and skilled trades. Their contributions extend far beyond the classroom, strengthening local economies, expanding pathways to upward mobility, and ensuring that Alabama's workforce remains competitive and resilient.

This capstone case study synthesizes insights from nine preceding studies on topics ranging from **adult learners, advising, data utilization, dual enrollment, return on investment, transfer programs, and workforce development**. The final two case studies will capture insights from the presidents who lead the HBCCs/PBCCs and supporting higher education public policy recommendations based on student voices. This case study highlights four key areas:

- 1 Why HBCCs/PBCCs Matter**
- 2 Institutional Insights, Supports, and Pathways**
- 3 Advancements Toward Student Success**
- 4 Shaping the Future of Higher Education in Alabama**

*Their contributions extend far beyond the classroom, strengthening local economies, expanding pathways to upward mobility, and ensuring that Alabama's workforce remains competitive and resilient.*

Guided by Alabama Possible's vision to elevate the accomplishments of the Great Eight—Bishop State, Chattahoochee Valley, Drake State, Gadsden State, Lawson State, Shelton State, Trenholm State, and Wallace Selma—this project provides a platform to showcase institutional resilience, highlight student-centered practices, and amplify leadership strategies that are shaping Alabama's educational and economic future.

The case study project created a unique opportunity to document how these colleges have navigated resource constraints, workforce demands, and barriers to access, while also embracing innovation in advising, data utilization, and access-centered design. By capturing both successes and lessons learned, this body of work seeks to inform policymakers, funders, and higher education leaders about the critical role HBCCs and PBCCs play in strengthening educational pathways, expanding economic mobility, and fueling Alabama's long-term workforce and community development.

## Executive Summary

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Alabama's eight HBCCs and PBCCs—**the Great Eight**—are essential to advancing access, workforce readiness, and opportunity across the state. They serve as gateways to higher education, engines of local and regional economies, and anchors of community well-being. This capstone case study synthesizes findings from nine preceding studies and highlights four key areas:

**1**

### **Why Alabama HBCCs/PBCCs Matter**

HBCCs/PBCCs play a transformative role in Alabama by expanding access to affordable, high-quality education. They:

- Provide **affordable transfer pathways**, enabling students to complete their degrees at a lower cost.
- Offer **career training programs** aligned with Alabama's high-demand industries, from healthcare to advanced manufacturing and information technology.
- Strengthen **early education opportunities** through dual enrollment, accelerating time to degree, and building student confidence.
- Anchor communities by expanding **access and opportunity**, particularly for rural, first-generation, and low-income students.

**2**

### **Institutional Insights, Supports, and Pathways**

The **Great Eight** demonstrate that student success depends on more than classroom instruction; it requires holistic, equity-centered supports. Key insights include:

- **Academic Support:** Tutoring centers, success coaches, and targeted advising for transfer and career pathways.
- **Career Development:** Apprenticeships, internships, and workforce-aligned curricula ensure direct connections to high-demand jobs.
- **Well-being and Mental Health:** Counseling, wellness programming, and crisis response services integrated into student supports.
- **Financial and Community Outreach:** Scholarships, mobile advising, TRIO-funded programs, and rural engagement initiatives broaden access.
- **Partnerships and Transfer Pathways:** Articulation agreements with HBCC/PBCCs, regional universities, and employers expand educational and career opportunities.

**3**

### **Advancements Toward Student Success**

Across Alabama's Historically Black and Predominantly Black Community Colleges, the pursuit of student success is marked by resilience, innovation, and strategic collaboration. Despite ongoing challenges—such as funding and persistent barriers like childcare, housing, and transportation—**the Great Eight** continue to advance bold, student-centered reforms that expand access and improve outcomes.

## 4

### ***Emerging Innovations and Scalable Practices***

- **Strengthening Advising and Student Engagement:** Colleges are redesigning advising systems to ensure proactive, personalized support. By aligning faculty, advisors, and student success coaches, institutions can foster more consistent communication and implement earlier interventions for at-risk students.
- **Expanding Early College and Dual Enrollment Pathways:** Dual enrollment and early college initiatives enable high school students to earn college credit, thereby reducing both the time and cost associated with degree completion. These programs build academic confidence and strengthen local talent pipelines.
- **Enhancing Workforce Alignment and Career Navigation:** By integrating career coaching, work-based learning, and industry-recognized credentials into academic programs, HBCCs and PBCCs ensure that students gain the skills and experiences necessary for both immediate employment and long-term career mobility.
- **Building Institutional Capacity Through Data and Technology:** Colleges are investing in data-informed decision-making by developing return-on-investment (ROI) frameworks, strengthening institutional research capacity, and adopting technology platforms to monitor student progress and assess program effectiveness.
- **Creating a Culture of Belonging and Support:** Institutions are promoting environments that normalize help-seeking behaviors and prioritize holistic student well-being. Through peer mentoring, mental health programming, and financial literacy initiatives, colleges are addressing nonacademic factors that affect persistence and completion.

### ***Recommendations for Sustained Progress***

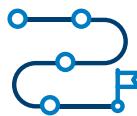
To sustain and scale these advancements, the **Great Eight** can build on existing momentum by:

- 1 Deepening cross-sector partnerships that connect education, workforce, and community ecosystems to ensure career pathways lead to gainful employment.
- 2 Expanding funding and policy supports for adult learners, childcare, and transportation.
- 3 Investing in staff and faculty development to enhance data literacy and advising effectiveness to ensure every student stays on the path to completion.
- 4 Elevating storytelling and outcome reporting to demonstrate institutional impact and attract continued investment and potential students.

Together, these strategies position Alabama's HBCCs and PBCCs as models of inclusive excellence, championing student success through innovation, evidence-based practices, and an unwavering commitment to community advancement.

# Shaping the Future of Higher Education in Alabama

The future of Alabama's community colleges is rooted in adaptability, access, and innovation. The **Great Eight** are positioned to:



## Integrate Guided Pathways:

Strengthen clear, structured academic and career pathways that help students choose a program early, follow a recommended course sequence, receive proactive advising, and connect learning to real job opportunities.



## Lead Digital Transformation:

Scale hybrid and online learning options, expand virtual student support, and use AI-driven advising tools to better serve working adults and rural learners.



## Deepen Workforce Alignment:

Build agile training pipelines in collaboration with employers across aerospace, healthcare, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, and information technology to ensure students graduate job-ready.



## Advance Student-Centered Design:

Expand targeted supports and reduce barriers that affect persistence, particularly for rural, first-generation, and returning adult learners.



## Secure Sustainable Investment:

Leverage philanthropy, public-private partnerships, state funding, and return-on-investment frameworks to strengthen capacity and long-term impact.



## Strengthen Global Competitiveness:

Prepare students for emerging and evolving fields, enhancing Alabama's position in regional, national, and international talent development.

### Key Insights:

The **Great Eight** community colleges in Alabama play a critical role in advancing the state's educational and economic vitality—especially for first-generation, rural, and historically underserved learners. These institutions demonstrate resilient, student-centered leadership and are already driving meaningful progress, yet their continued success depends on sustained investment in **data capacity, advising systems, and student support infrastructure**.



## The Great Eight Economic and Workforce Impact

Alabama's Great Eight community colleges—Bishop State, Chattahoochee Valley, Drake State, Gadsden State, Lawson State, Shelton State, Trenholm State, and Wallace Community College Selma—are economic engines and workforce anchors for the regions they serve. Together, they contribute billions in total economic impact, support tens of thousands of jobs, and significantly increase lifetime earnings for graduates, particularly those from first-generation, rural, and historically underserved communities. They supply Alabama's talent pipeline in high-demand fields, including nursing and allied health, advanced manufacturing, Information Technology (IT) and cybersecurity, construction trades, public safety, and early childhood and K-12 support professions. These colleges also serve as primary on-ramps to the middle class, reducing unemployment, expanding local tax bases, and strengthening employer competitiveness across the state. When Alabama invests in its community colleges—especially those serving high-need populations—it directly strengthens families, local economies, and the state's long-term workforce resilience.

Using the published FY 2023-2024 data in 2025, each of the eight HBCC/PBCC local, regional, and state economic and workforce impacts are as follows:

<b><a href="#">Bishop State</a></b>  <a href="#">Mobile, Alabama</a>	\$263.8 million in added income; alumni alone generated \$203.5 million and supported <b>2,653 jobs</b> . <sup>1</sup>
<b><a href="#">Chattahoochee Valley</a></b>  <a href="#">Phenix City, Alabama</a>	\$89.7 million total impact and <b>1,309 jobs</b> supported; an average CVCC associate grad earns about <b>\$7,700 more per year</b> than a high-school graduate. <sup>2</sup>
<b><a href="#">J.F. Drake State</a></b>  <a href="#">Huntsville, Alabama</a>	\$21 million total impact and <b>216 jobs</b> supported; 2021 grads' lifetime earnings estimated at \$501.2 million (+20% vs. no credential). <sup>3</sup>
<b><a href="#">Gadsden State</a></b>  <a href="#">Gadsden, Alabama</a>	\$270.5 million total impact (2.3% of its region's GRP) and the equivalent of <b>4,415 jobs</b> supported. <sup>4</sup>
<b><a href="#">Lawson State</a></b>  <a href="#">Birmingham, Alabama</a>	\$368.1 million total impact and <b>4,765 jobs</b> supported; alumni impact \$298.9 million. <sup>5</sup>
<b><a href="#">Shelton State</a></b>  <a href="#">Tuscaloosa, Alabama</a>	\$309.7 million total impact (2.1% of local GRP); alumni impact \$256.9 million; <b>14k+ credit &amp; non-credit students</b> . <sup>6</sup>
<b><a href="#">Trenholm State</a></b>  <a href="#">Montgomery, Alabama</a>	\$51.5 million total impact and <b>484 jobs</b> supported; 2021 grads' lifetime earnings estimated at \$525 million (+24%). <sup>7</sup>
<b><a href="#">Wallace Community College</a></b>  <a href="#">Selma, Alabama</a>	\$66.9 million total impact, <b>1,167 jobs</b> supported; grads earn \$7,300 more per year than those with only a high-school diploma. <sup>8</sup>
<b><a href="#">Alabama Community College System, Statewide Workforce Effect</a></b>	Alabama's community colleges collectively contribute <b>\$8.1 billion</b> to the state economy and support <b>114,000 jobs</b> ; on average, associate degree completers earn <b>\$9,200 more annually</b> than high-school graduates, with strong pipelines in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, construction, IT, and public services. <sup>9</sup>

## Why HBCCs/PBCCs Matter

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HBCCs and PBCCs matter because they expand pathways to personal, academic, and economic mobility for students and communities across Alabama—particularly those who have historically been underserved or excluded from higher education. These colleges equip learners with in-demand skills for high-growth fields such as healthcare, manufacturing, biotechnology, and IT, directly strengthening Alabama’s workforce. Through dual-enrollment opportunities, students begin college earlier, building confidence and momentum toward degree completion. HBCCs and PBCCs offer high-quality instruction in supportive, community-based learning environments at a fraction of the cost of four-year institutions, with clear 2+2 transfer pathways that make a bachelor’s degree attainable without excessive debt.

Most importantly, these institutions uphold open-door access missions, prioritizing service to first-generation, rural, and economically under-resourced students who might otherwise be left without a viable path to college or career advancement. Their economic contributions are also significant: collectively, the eight HBCCs/PBCCs generate approximately **\$1.4 billion** in economic impact, thereby anchoring local economies, supporting regional workforce growth, and expanding opportunities in the communities that need them most.

## Institutional Insights, Supports, and Pathways

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Alabama’s HBCCs and PBCCs provide wraparound support through:

-  **Academic Support:**  
Tutoring centers, success coaches, and transfer advising.
-  **Career Development:**  
STEM pathways, apprenticeships, and workforce-aligned programs.
-  **Mental Health:**  
Counseling, wellness programs, and crisis support partnerships.
-  **Financial Support:**  
Scholarships, VA benefits, and targeted aid for transfer students.
-  **Student Outreach:**  
Mobile advising, TRIO-funded adult education programs, and grant-based career pipelines.
-  **Partnerships:**  
Strong articulation agreements with regional universities and industries expand opportunities.

Alabama’s HBCCs and PBCCs provide far more than academic instruction; they are comprehensive support systems that recognize the interconnectedness of academic achievement, workforce readiness, and personal well-being. Each institution blends traditional classroom learning with wraparound services designed to help students persist, graduate, and thrive.



## ***Academic Support and Advising***

Strong academic foundations are central to student success. All eight institutions have developed robust learning centers and advising structures. These include coaching, tutoring programs, time management and study skill workshops, and targeted academic counseling.

- **Bishop State** integrates transfer and career counseling, helping students map both academic and career pathways.
- **Chattahoochee Valley** provides specialized transfer counseling for dual-enrolled high school students.
- **Drake State** has pioneered a [Student Success Coach model](#), ensuring underserved students receive proactive and individualized guidance.
- **Gadsden State** operates an [Advising and Retention Center](#) that helps students balance course selection with personal challenges.
- **Lawson State and Shelton State** strengthen academic foundations through their respective Student Success Centers and Shelton's Learning Resource Center. Lawson also offers a structured [First-Year Experience program](#) (integrated into the new student orientation) that introduces students to study strategies, college expectations, and planning for degree completion.
- **Trenholm** offers embedded academic support within career and technical programs to ensure students build skills while progressing toward workforce goals.
- **Wallace Selma** supports academic persistence through its [Student Success Coaches](#), who collaborate with students to help them achieve their academic, personal, social, and career goals, ultimately leading to employment.



## ***Career Development and Workforce Alignment***

Career services at HBCCs and PBCCs extend beyond resume writing and interview preparation. They link directly to regional workforce needs through apprenticeships, internships, and industry partnerships.

- **Bishop State's STEM Pathways Program** provides scholarships, degree mapping, and transfer guidance to STEM majors in Pre-Engineering, Pre-Medicine, or Pre-Pharmacy.
- **Chattahoochee Valley and Gadsden State** embed Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities into advising and program design.
- **Drake State** connects students to local high-demand industries such as aerospace, defense, and biotechnology.
- **Lawson State's Office of Career & College Transfer Services** provides transfer counseling, career coaching, job fairs, employer networking events, and paid internship pathways in collaboration with Birmingham-area employers and union apprenticeship programs.
- **Shelton State's Workforce Training** offers short-term credentials, apprenticeships, and work-based learning that lead directly to employment.
- **Trenholm's Career and Technical Education (CTE) division** collaborates with employers to offer internships, industry-recognized certifications, and direct job placement pipelines.
- **Wallace Selma's** Career Services Office hosts employer recruiting events and connects students to job placement and apprenticeship opportunities.

By aligning programs with Alabama's labor market, these institutions ensure students graduate with both credentials and employable skills.



## ***Mental Health and Well-Being***

Recognizing that academic persistence is deeply tied to well-being, these colleges invest in counseling and wellness programs:

- **[Bishop State's Wildcat CARE Team](#)** provides proactive intervention and case management.
- **[Chattahoochee Valley](#)** embeds personal counseling within its disability services unit.
- **[Drake State](#)** integrates counseling services for stress, anxiety, and adjustment into its student support programs.
- **[Gadsden State](#)** partners with Uwill to deliver free teletherapy and crisis support.
- **[Lawson State](#)** emphasizes early-alert faculty referrals to connect students with help before challenges escalate.
- **[Shelton State](#)** partners with local health and community agencies to provide students with access to ongoing mental health care and comprehensive support services.
- **[Trenholm State](#)** integrates wellness discussions into new-student orientation to help normalize help-seeking behaviors.
- **[Wallace Selma](#)** partners with regional health organizations to expand access to mental health resources, emergency intervention, and well-being education for students.

This holistic model reinforces the idea that student well-being is inextricably linked to academic success.



## ***Financial Support and Affordability***

Affordability remains a critical driver of community college enrollment and completion. All institutions provide access to federal, state, and institutional aid—including scholarships, VA benefits, and work-study opportunities. Gadsden State supplements these with targeted transfer scholarships, while Bishop State emphasizes affordability in comparison to four-year institutions. Wallace Selma dual enrollment is 100% free to students, including summer courses.



## ***Student Development and Outreach***

Beyond academics, these colleges are deeply engaged in community outreach and student readiness:

- **[Bishop State and Drake State](#)** offer cohort-based, grant-funded programs that prepare students for high-demand fields.
- **[Chattahoochee Valley's Center to Improve Rural Student Success \(CIRSS\)](#)** delivers mobile advising and workshops in underserved rural communities.
- **[Gadsden State's Cheaha Educational Opportunity Center \(EOC\)](#)**, a TRIO-funded initiative, supports adults in achieving GED completion, navigating financial aid, and receiving enrollment assistance.
- **[Lawson State](#)** hosts **community-based recruitment and financial aid events** across Birmingham and Bessemer to support first-generation and adult learners entering or returning to college.

- **Shelton State's** Adult Education and Literacy Center provides GED preparation, job readiness, and re-engagement pathways for learners returning to education.
- **Trenholm State's Student Success Center (SSC) sponsors leadership activities, peer mentoring, and service-learning opportunities** that help students develop confidence and career direction.
- **Wallace Selma** emphasizes **personalized advising and mentoring** to help students develop a sense of belonging and persistence.

#### Key Insights:

These colleges strike a balance between **dual enrollment**, **transfer preparation**, and **workforce readiness**, while prioritizing access for underserved learners.



## Advancements Toward Student Success

Advancements toward student success across Alabama's HBCCs and PBCCs require intentional strategies that **address both academic and nonacademic barriers**. While these institutions are deeply committed to supporting adult and returning learners, advising models often need to be more tailored and robust, and limited data systems can make it difficult to track student progress and intervene early. Additionally, childcare, transportation, and other life circumstances continue to hinder persistence and completion for many students.

To accelerate progress, colleges are working to expand *early education models*—such as dual enrollment and parent-engaged orientations—to build academic momentum before college even begins. Strengthening a campus-wide help-seeking culture, fostering stronger partnerships between faculty and advisors, and investing in data governance and literacy are essential steps for improving day-to-day student support. Finally, *using clear return-on-investment metrics* can help institutions, policymakers, and communities better understand and communicate the value of these colleges to learners, families, and the state.

*Advancements toward student success across Alabama's HBCCs and PBCCs require intentional strategies that address both academic and nonacademic barriers.*

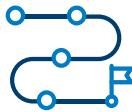
#### Key Insights:

The Return on Investment (ROI) highlights the substantial value these institutions provide to both students and their communities. It measures the tangible benefits of education—such as improved employment outcomes, higher income levels, and expanded career advancement opportunities—demonstrating the lasting impact of HBCCs and PBCCs on individual and regional prosperity.



## The Future of HBCCs and PBCCs

Looking ahead, Alabama's Historically Black and Predominantly Black Community Colleges are positioned to deepen and expand their transformational impact on students, families, and regional economies. The next era of growth will focus on:



### Guided Pathways:

Strengthening clear, program-to-career roadmaps that help students choose a field of study early, follow a structured course sequence, stay on track through proactive advising, and connect classroom learning to real workforce opportunities.



### Digital Transformation:

Scaling hybrid/online learning and AI-driven advising to reach working adults and rural learners.



### Stronger Workforce Alignment:

Deepening partnerships with industries in healthcare, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and IT.



### Student-Centered Design:

Expanding targeted supports and removing barriers to help rural, first-generation, and returning adult learners persist and complete their programs.



### Sustainable Funding & Partnerships:

Leveraging philanthropy, public-private partnerships, and ROI-driven investments.



### Global Competitiveness:

Preparing students for emerging fields while strengthening Alabama's position in the national and international economy.

#### Key Insights:

The future of the HBCCs/PBCCs rests on their ability to remain **accessible, adaptive, and access-driven**, serving as the foundation of Alabama's workforce and social mobility.



## Conclusion

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Alabama's eight Historically Black and Predominantly Black Community Colleges stand at the center of the state's efforts to expand educational access, strengthen the workforce, and support community vitality. The insights captured throughout this case study reaffirm that the Great Eight are not only institutions of learning, but also institutions of opportunity. Their work demonstrates that when students are provided with clear academic pathways, wraparound support, workforce-aligned training, and environments that foster a sense of belonging, they persist, graduate, and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities.

Yet sustaining and scaling this progress will require continued investment in advising capacity, data systems, student supports, and collaborative partnerships with K-12 schools, employers, universities, and state leaders. The evidence is clear: when HBCCs and PBCCs are empowered, Alabama strengthens its talent pipeline, expands economic mobility, and builds resilient local and regional economies. Moving forward, policymakers, funders, and higher education leaders have a critical opportunity not only to recognize the value of the Great Eight but also to ensure they have the resources and infrastructure needed to continue transforming lives for generations to come.

Alabama's future is stronger when these colleges are strong.

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## ENDNOTES

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**Bishop State Community College**  
**Chattahoochee Valley Community College**  
**J.F. Drake State Community & Technical College**  
**Gadsden State Community College**  
**Lawson State Community College**  
**Shelton State Community College**  
**H. Councill Trenholm State Community College**  
**Wallace Community College Selma**

*the*  
**GREAT  
EIGHT**

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