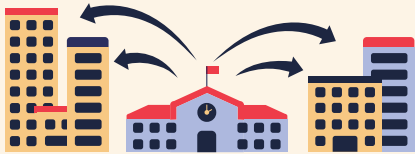


ISSUE SUMMARY:

Empowering Regional Workforces

As pillars of their communities, the country's 520 regional public Universities (RPU) are fundamentally linked with the needs and development of their local workforce. Often founded as normal schools or state teachers' colleges, RPUs historically produced the educators, nurses, engineers, accountants, entrepreneurs, data scientists, and other professionals needed to grow America's economy.

In a globalized economy, businesses often struggle to fill shortages, with position openings far exceeding qualified candidates. RPUs' mission and commitment to regional stewardship directly align academic programs to workforce needs of local employers. They accomplish this by partnering with local industry and community leaders to support economic and social growth for the mutual benefit of graduates, industry, and regional communities.



Regional public universities empower regional workforces by producing graduates with the skills and qualifications required by local industries and employers.

RPUs: Responsive, Flexible, Innovative

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

To secure a talent pipeline in the fields of information technology (IT) and advanced cybersecurity, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) approached East Tennessee State University (ETSU), which led to the creation of the [BlueSky Tennessee Institute](#). Through extensive collaboration, BCBST and ETSU created a curriculum, organized internships, and established job-embedded experiences for the BlueSky Institute. In connecting with local business needs, the partnership intrinsically embraced emerging best practices in the IT and data science fields.

In two and a half years, students at the BlueSky Institute can earn a bachelor's degree in computing with a concentration in information systems and hands-on experience working in real-world business environments. Successful graduates are guaranteed a full-time job offer with full benefits from BCBST; however, they can elect to work for another employer without facing any financial (or other) penalty. Before the development of the BlueSky Tennessee Institute:

120 jobs

were outsourced by BCBST due to a lack of qualified candidates.

50 positions

were found to be consistently vacant every year by BCBST.

4,500 job openings

are available in Tennessee for graduates with less than two years of experience.

RPUs: Partners in Prosperity

STOCKTON UNIVERSITY (NJ)

Collaboration is at the heart of successful community engagement efforts between postsecondary institutions and local economies. In New Jersey, Stockton University partners with businesses and corporations in the Atlantic City hospitality, health care, and nonprofit industries to address education and workforce development barriers while managing chronic summer labor shortages.

The [Atlantic City Summer Experience Live, Work, Learn program](#) provides employment opportunities and internships to students participating in experiential learning opportunities. Corporations partner with the university, creating a scaffold for guided work experiences that encourage students to network among local businesses and explore employment opportunities post-graduation. Employment opportunities range from accounting, finance, human resources, marketing, IT, administration, and public safety to hospitality, health care, and various other experiences.

700 students applied for the inaugural year; **153** students were accepted—substantially higher than the anticipated enrollment of **40** students. In 2024, **256** students were enrolled in the program.

- Qualified students receive **campus housing** in the city for the summer (paid by the employer), **badging certification** for completing career readiness workshops, **paid employment**, and a **discount on summer courses**.

RPUs: Securing Futures and the Homeland

MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Robins Air Force Base (RAFB) is the region's largest employer in Houston County, Georgia. As its mission transitions from repairing, modifying, and overhauling aircraft to working with Advanced Battle Management Systems, a new high-tech platform, it requires more IT and computer science professionals.

To respond to the base's significant shift in technology needs and retain high-paying jobs in the central region, Middle Georgia State University (MGA) launched a [dual-enrollment program](#) to educate nearby high school and current undergraduate students. This program, designed to support the base's science, technology, engineering, and math workforce, aims to connect current and prospective students with lucrative careers in high-need fields, all while staying local. While MGA currently offers majors and degree pathways related to the employment needs at RAFB, it recognized the potential of creating a strategic program where the base and Houston County School District could meet and graduate more people into technology jobs.

- The program provides **on-site classes** with the potential for **paid internships** at the Synergy Innovation Center in Warner Robins.
- Students **share space** with the base's software engineers and IT professionals.
- Students who complete all courses earn a **Certificate in Information Technology** from Middle Georgia State University.
- During its first two years, **36 students enrolled** and registered for 82 classes.
- **Six students have successfully earned** the Certificate in Information Technology. Several others are progressing toward its completion.