

# LIVE. WORK. ACHIEVE.

Mississippi Partnerships for Employment of Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities  
[www.mspeidd.org](http://www.mspeidd.org)



**It's  
Time**

*Mississippians with disabilities are a largely untapped resource for employers.*

Governor Phil Bryant  
Executive Order 1335  
January 14, 2014

The MSPE project is working to make those changes in Mississippi that will assist youth and young adults with I/DD in becoming employed in the community:

- Developing or changing policies to support integrated employment
- Removing systemic barriers to integrated employment
- Implementing strategies and exploring and scaling up promising practices that improve employment outcomes
- Building cross-system and cross-agency collaboration



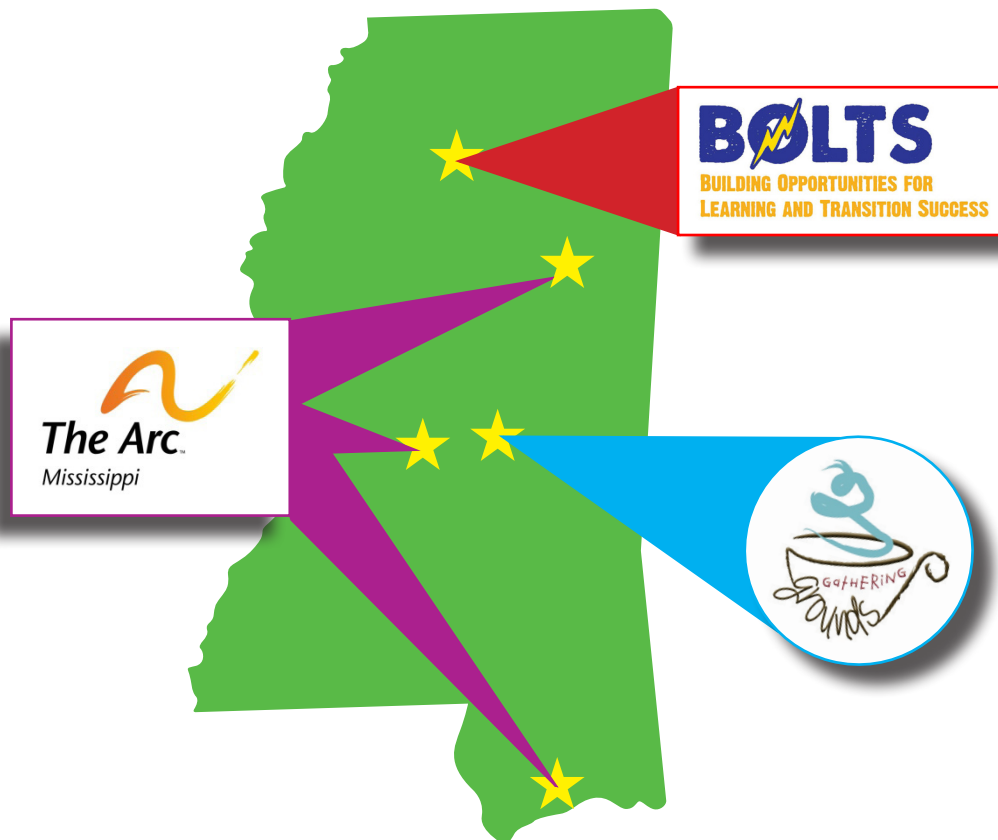
## Pilot Projects Promote Employment for Youth with I/DD

If the path from the classroom to employment in Mississippi's communities were more direct, more youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) would be working.

Three pilot projects funded since 2012 by the Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE) project are working to demonstrate how schools can improve transition services, provide

students with actual employment experiences while in school, and assist in finding competitive employment in the community when students leave school.

The Oxford School District's BOLTS, Rankin County School District's Gathering Grounds, and The Arc of Mississippi's Customized Employment projects are devising everyday employment solutions.



Three MSPE pilot projects assist students in transitioning from school to work.

## [BOLTS: Building Opportunities for Learning and Transition Success](#)

Through the BOLTS project, the Oxford School District has expanded its array of transition services for students with I/DD, including an increased focus on competitive community employment. “We’re always looking for resources that will build a network for each young person to move ahead in their lives,” said Dr. Patricia Austin, project director. Those resources might be independent living skills for one student and public transportation for another. School-based training, which includes greenhouse and pottery activities as well as community-based training and internships, allow students to move into full-time employment. Since the beginning of the project, BOLTS has assisted 41 students become employed in Oxford-area communities.



## [Customized Employment: Linking Job Seekers with Employers](#)

“We’re putting in place something that did not exist,” said Mike Montgomery, project director. The Arc of Mississippi set out to replicate what other states have been using successfully—a network of provider agencies to augment the development of customized employment in Mississippi. The project has worked with youth and young adults in three areas of the state—Jackson, Hattiesburg and Starkville—to employ four young people with significant disabilities through customized employment. Along the way, the project has established business advisory councils in each location to promote the employment of people with disabilities in each community and worked with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services to make changes to policies and procedures to allow for a network of customized employment providers.



## [Gathering Grounds](#)

Coffee, snacks and creative artwork have been combined to give Rankin County area residents a place to gather and provide Rankin County School District students with disabilities a “real-world environment.” Gathering Grounds in Brandon is a community-based business where students are learning work skills and social skills. Students interact with each other, with students from other schools and with the public. “It’s amazing to see our students blossom,” said Holladay Burnham, project director. “Just operating the cash register empowers our students, and everything they learn translates into community jobs.” Since the inception of this project, 14 students have moved on to jobs in the community.

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The **Mississippi Partnerships for Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (MSPE)** consortium was established in 2011 to develop and direct a state-level collaborative approach to improve employment outcomes for Mississippi youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The goal of the MSPE project is to build capacity across existing state services for sustainable systems change that improve outcomes for youth and young adults with I/DD seeking competitive employment in integrated settings. Find project information, employment resources and more on the MSPE website at [www.mspeidd.org](http://www.mspeidd.org).