



**HARRISON COUNTY**  
Development Commission



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 29, 2020

### **HARRISON COUNTY ACHIEVES ACT WORK READY COMMUNITY CERTIFICATION**

(Gulfport, Miss) - Harrison County, Mississippi has achieved the ACT Work Ready Community certification designation—a 2-year process completed in six months and the 55<sup>th</sup> county in Mississippi to reach certification. The county's Work Ready Initiative was approved through a resolution in late summer of 2018 by the Harrison County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and is a collaborative effort between the BOS, Harrison County Development Commission, Port of Gulfport, Gulfport School District, and community and business leaders.

Harrison County Supervisor Kent Jones, District Four, says, "The ACT Work Ready Initiative was precisely what this county needed to advance our future economic growth. The Board of Supervisors is grateful to the Harrison County Development Commission and all those who assisted for their dedication to our workforce."

Now that Harrison County has obtained the work ready designation, all three coastal counties are considered ACT Work Ready certified, which is critical to marketing the region to economic developers.

Brandi Hough, Harrison County Development Commission's Director of Business Development, is emphatic about the importance of the certified designation and says, "Certification would not have been achieved as expeditiously without the support of 106 employers who recognized or recommended the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). Everyone wins now that Harrison County is Work Ready certified—businesses, job-seekers, educators, our county and ultimately, all the Mississippi Gulf Coast."

An essential certification requirement included ACT WorkKeys testing, which was administered to individuals who are considered emerging workforce (high school, college, recent graduates), transitioning workforce (job-seekers, adult education, recent veterans), and the current workforce.

Sandy Commer-East, Public Relations/Career Pathways Specialist, Gulfport School District says, "Gulfport High School is committed to providing all senior students with the opportunity to take the ACT WorkKeys skills assessment. The resulting NCRC is nationally recognized by potential employers and Career and Technical higher education programs, and indicates a student's foundational skills to do most any job."

Currently 2,892 Harrison county residents have become ACT Work Ready certified with 72% being at the Silver or higher level. As for Gulfport High School, Commer-East adds, "We can proudly say that over 68% of our students scored Silver Certification Level or above when tested. Gulfport High School students are well prepared to successfully enter the workforce. We feel all of our students deserve this valuable tool for future college and career recruitment opportunities."

Being certified is significant as it indicates "Harrison County is Workforce Ready" and establishes that the county has a skilled, quality workforce. Data will be utilized in recruiting new business and industry expansion, while educators can close the skill gap with a measuring tool for students and individuals to use when searching for a job.

According to the Port of Gulfport's Director of Workforce Development Mel Arsenault, "Nationally recognized credentials like the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) are even more important in these times as we work towards rebuilding our economy. Job-seekers have a verified credential to prove their actual skills to employers and employers now have a tool to assist them in hiring the most skilled applicants to fill their current job openings."

Furthermore, workforce development is a top priority for the state and the philosophy extends to Governor Tate Reeves. "I believe in Mississippi. We need to work to promote a culture of work and to enable Mississippi's workforce to compete with anyone anywhere in the country, and in fact anyone anywhere in the world." Governor Reeves added "And Mississippians can compete."

The Harrison County Work Ready Community next steps will be to complete the next level of the certification process, which includes continuing to assist more Harrison County residents with obtaining their NCRC certification. In addition, Harrison County will collaborate with the ACT Work Ready teams in Hancock and Jackson counties to support the Mississippi "One Coast" approach.

For more information visit the Harrison County ACT Work Ready Communities page.  
<https://www.workreadycommunities.org/MS/047>

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