What is education?

Educational attainment is the highest grade of school an individual attends and completes. Educational proficiency measures a student’s mastery of skills and understanding. High school dropout rates are defined here as the percentage of students in grades nine through 12 who dropped out of school in the past year (event dropout rate) or the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled and have not yet completed high school (status dropout rate).

How many Mississippi residents are affected?

In 2007–2008:

- 4.6% of Mississippi public school students in grades 9-12 dropped out of school (event dropout rate) in the preceding year.
- The freshman graduation rate in Mississippi was 63.9%, compared to 74.9% nationally.

As of 2008:

- 20.1% of adults (age 25 and older) in Mississippi—about 374,000 persons—had not completed high school, and 50.2% had not attended one or more years of college.
- 7.3% of adults (age 25 and older) in Mississippi had less than a 9th grade education and 3.1% had completed less than 7 years.

As of 2009, the most current year for which data are available:

- 38.4% of 8th graders scored below basic on reading proficiency and 45.7% scored below basic on mathematics proficiency in all schools (public and private).

As of 2009, almost half (45.5%) of all 4th graders in Mississippi public schools scored below basic on reading proficiency and 30.9% scored below basic on mathematics proficiency.
What are the trends?
Between 1992 and 2009, the percentage of Mississippi 4th and 8th grade students who scored below basic in mathematics proficiency assessments decreased by 33.3 and 20.9 percentage points, respectively.

Who is affected?
Males: In 2007–2008, the event dropout rate in Mississippi was higher for males (5.5%) than females (3.7%).

Seniors: In 2008, one out of three (34.1%) older adults (age 65 and older) in Mississippi had not completed high school.

Minorities: In 2009, the percentage of persons age 25 and older who completed a bachelor’s degree was 22.2% among whites, 11.5% among blacks, and 11.7% among Hispanics.

The Poor: In 2009, average reading proficiency scores were lower among low-income Mississippi 4th graders eligible for the National School Lunch Program than among non-poor students who were ineligible (203 vs. 227).

Why does it matter?
Poor education limits future prospects for employment, earnings, housing, and health. It is a growing problem in an era based on a knowledge economy. An inadequate education can perpetuate a cycle of distress for families across multiple generations.

Sources and methods
The statistics reported here were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 2009. The data underwent statistical analysis by the research staff of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. Analytic methods are detailed at www.humanneeds.vcu.edu.