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## EDITORIAL: Income sufficiency

Sep 02, 2009 (Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) --



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Most Mississippians of working age, even in these tough times, have a job, and most try their best to make ends meet, supporting themselves and their families without assistance. But incomes don't always meet expenses, and thousands of those situations weigh heavily on personal well-being and the statewide economy.

The privately funded Mississippi Economic Policy Center on Tuesday issued a lengthy study on what makes a sufficient income for self-support for families of various sizes, and some of the numbers restate a persistent story of low educational attainment linked to low-wage jobs.

The amount of wages earned, of course, does not measure individual worth, but income compared to family need inarguably plays into quality of life issues, including necessities.

One of the measures illuminating the problem is the number of people in the largest job groups and what they make compared to a sufficient income -- living without government or private assistance and providing life's necessities:

\* 43,910 cashiers statewide (the largest job category) earn a median income of \$15,666, but that is 43 percent of a sufficient wage for one adult, one pre-school child and one child in school.

\* 27,350 registered nurses, by comparison, earn a median income of \$52,194, which is 142 percent of the sufficiency standard.

\* 21,300 truck drivers earn a median \$33,586, which is 92 percent of the sufficiency standard.

The sufficiency standard, calculated using 2008 and 2009 information

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about housing, childcare, food, and other household expenses, was compiled by a research center at the University of Washington, an independent and analytical eye.

Discrepancies were greater for families headed by women, which adds to Mississippi's sufficiency burden because more than 50 percent of all babies in our state are born to single mothers.

Low-education attainment levels of most sub-sufficiency families can be addressed in the long term by education: finishing high school, advanced training, community college and baccalaureate degrees.

While the conclusions about education are not new, the 2009 disparities between incomes at various education-attainment levels are almost shocking:

\* Non-high school graduates in Mississippi can expect to make \$25,513 per year (men) and \$15,308 for women.

\* Community college degree holders can earn \$39,545 and \$27,299 respectively.

\* Bachelor's degree holders can earn \$51,026 and \$32,274 respectively.

\* Doctoral degree earners can expect \$72,713 and \$51,026 respectively.

Our state leadership must find ways to put more under-educated adults back in school, especially providing low-cost child care to help make that self-advancement possible.

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