

The Lowndes County School District's Career & Technology Center (CTC) is one of 25 schools and districts in the state of Mississippi that Tuesday was awarded part of approximately \$1.4 million from the EquipMS Grant program to foster career and technical education efforts.

The CTC will receive \$75,731 that director Susan McClelland said will go toward purchasing two heavy machinery simulators.

"I think this is going to be great for our students and our carpentry and construction program," McClelland said. "All of the classes will be able to use the simulators. This is a big win for Lowndes County."

McClelland said the CTC worked with Melinda Lowe, the executive director of the FORGE Foundation, and Nic Parish, of Burns Dirt, to draft the grant.

McClelland also said Parish is helping the CTC bridge the gap with the new construction program at The Communiversity, East Mississippi Community College's Workforce Services Division in Columbus. She said the simulators will help CTC students stay on track to continue their training and education if they decide to move to The Communiversity.

"If you can master these levels on the simulator, you can pretty much go out and operate everything," McClelland said. "The simulators will be a great recruitment tool. When we have the student tours of the CTC, I think the simulators will be a big draw to the middle schoolers and the ninth-graders.

"We're grateful to have the opportunity to go through the grant process and very excited to add the simulators to our programs."

McClelland said the simulators will be ordered as soon as possible. After that, she said the CTC would purchase the programs for

different pieces of heavy equipment and have its instructors trained to operate the simulators.

The state of Mississippi has allocated \$1,393,841.36 to schools and districts. The goal is to empower students by aligning their education with their future careers or post-secondary education programs.

The EquipMS Grant program, established through House Bill 588 (2023) as the Mississippi K-12 Workforce Development Grant program, aims to provide funding for Mississippi public school districts to modernize, replace or enhance priority sector career and technical high school programs.

Funding for these programs was targeted at manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, economic development priorities and construction and agriculture and designed to align closely with the local industry's demands.

“Successful career preparation doesn’t begin after a student receives a high school diploma,” said Courtney Taylor, AccelerateMS Deputy Director for Strategy and Programs. “Our state’s leadership is showing a strong commitment to strengthening our workforce development at all levels and this investment opens doors for students to acquire skills earlier and in more meaningful ways tied to local job opportunities.”

The largest grant of \$150,000 went to economic development in Noxubee County Career & Technical Education’s Engineering I & II programs.