

The future can be a scary proposition.



Carmen Machen

With so many options in an ever-changing world, it can be challenging for students to identify a subject area of interest or a possible career path.

Don't stress out, though, because Carmen Machen, Randy Conley and Knollie Edge want to help. Even if you aren't completely sure about your next step after high school, Machen and the career coaches in the Lowndes County School District (LCSD) want to help students plan for their futures.

"If you are unsure about what you are interested in pursuing, take time to reflect on what you want in a career," said Machen, who is the career coach at Caledonia High School. "Many students don't know what they want to pursue, and that's OK. It's normal. Meet with your career coach to take a personality quiz, learn about job shadowing or talk to professionals in different careers. You can learn a lot about what you like and don't like if you expose yourself to it."

Machen, Conley and Edge work in the area thanks to a partnership between Accelerate Mississippi, Three Rivers Planning & Development District (TRPDD) and the LCSD. Accelerate Mississippi serves the people and businesses of Mississippi by developing and deploying workforce strategies to connect individuals with transformative, high-paying careers. TRPDD is a private, non-profit organization formed by local government entities and business leaders to promote overall economic development, foster responsible short- and long-term community planning and aid general civic, social and economic development. Its core service area includes Calhoun, Chickasaw, Itawamba, Lafayette, Lee, Monroe, Pontotoc and Union counties, but several of its divisions provide services and support beyond those counties.

Machen, who is from Albertville, Alabama, has worked in education for four years. She said the career coach program, which was implemented last October in the northern part of Mississippi, fits her well because she enjoys assisting students with the skills that are important for success.

Machen said she tries to get to know students on a personal level to identify areas of interest. She encourages students to think about the lifestyle they want when they finish school, do they want to move away from home, what hours they would like to work and how much school they're willing to complete, among other things. From there, Machen said students can use tools like Major Clarity and Imagine the Possibilities to research different careers.

Major Clarity is a career and college readiness platform for middle and high school students that allows learners to test drive possible careers. It is available through LCSD. The app offers personality and learning style quizzes to help students determine what careers align with their interests. Students then can test drive possible careers by completing activities and videos. The platform also allows students to create resumes, research scholarships and more. To learn more about Major Clarity, go to: <https://majorclarity.com/>

The Imagine the Possibilities Career Expo virtual experience exposes students to 18 potential career pathways through an introductory video, mentor-for-a-minute clips, podcasts and other resources. Students from all 17 Northeast Mississippi counties in the CREATE Foundation, Inc. umbrella can participate in this experience, and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students can participate in a competition to win Apple prizes. Students gain points by reviewing the resources. You can learn more about Imagine the Possibilities by going to: <https://itpcareerexpo.com/>.

Machen said working with so many students always forces her to learn new things and to adapt when things change. She said the TRPDD provides career coaches with constant training and information. There also are plenty of people to help her assist students, like Ecosystem coordinators, who facilitate connections to industries, and Career and College Readiness teachers like Dorothy Rice (West Lowndes), Marcus Baldwin, Colleen Galvin and Logan Suggs (Caledonia) and Kali Harris and Juliana Miller (New Hope) who play key roles in educating students about finding their best path and teaching the skills they need to get there.

“If you do know what you want to pursue, great. It’s time to make a plan to achieve it,” Machen said. “Meet with your career coach to determine which schools offer the programs for you. Once accepted to a college, check your email regularly so you know what you need to do to complete your enrollment, including financial aid, applying for scholarships, completing housing applications and so forth.

“Once on campus, if you’re in a Career Technical program and interested in interning with a local company, meet with your advisor and professor to let them know. Find out what you need to do to qualify for internships.”