From Rural Districts to Statewide Pathways:
A Blueprint for Scaling Cybersecurity Workforce Development Through Regional Collaboration

Alabama's Cybersecurity Pathways in Action

THE OPPORTUNITY

Rethinking workforce development is essential, and Digital Promise partners with communities to strengthen pathways that expand opportunities. As the U.S. shifts toward a skills-based economy, we work alongside districts, states, and local education agencies to connect learners with the education, credentials, and careers that fuel lifelong opportunity. Workforce pathways connect learning to earning, ensuring every student has access to powerful, relevant learning experiences within school time and meaningful futures beyond it.

We see this shift in skills and workforce play out when we look at specific industries, such as cybersecurity. The United States is facing a critical cybersecurity workforce shortage, with information security analyst positions projected to grow 33% by 2033 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). Alabama's cybersecurity job market mirrors this national trend, with more than 8,000 new openings expected in 2024 alone (Cyberguide, 2025).

| Information Security Analysts | 33% |
| HIGHEST GROWTH CAREER | |

Software Developers	17%
Computer Systems Analysts	10%
Network Architects	4%
Network Administrators	3%
Average All Occupations	3.1%

Job Openings
8,851

Employed Workforce
19,121

*This data was retrieved from CyberSeek.org in 2024.
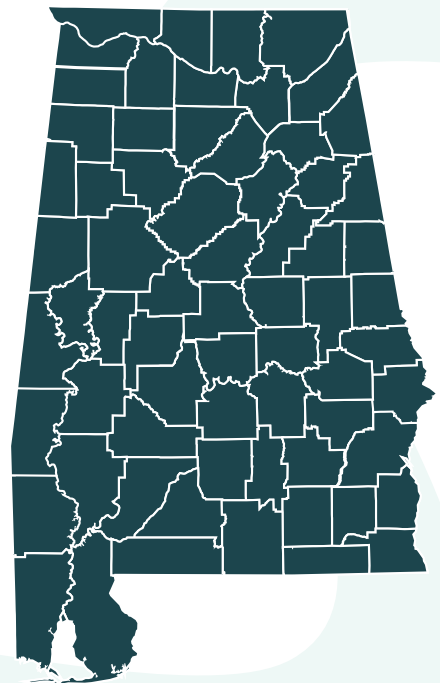
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THE PATHWAY

Digital Promise partnered with school districts across the country to address the growing workforce gap and launched the Inaugural Cybersecurity Pathways Cohort in 2023, supported by IBM, Hearst Foundations, and the Akamai Foundation.

Through the Cybersecurity Pathways Initiative, Digital Promise supported Alabama's Talladega County Schools in co-designing locally relevant Cybersecurity Pathways alongside students, families, and educators. Today, more than 200 high school students in Talladega County Schools are earning industry credentials and competing nationally, with many advancing into cybersecurity careers after graduation.

Funding from the Walton Family Foundation, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Akamai Foundation has helped the program to expand beyond Talladega County Schools through the East Alabama Regional Cybersecurity Alliance (EARCA), which now supports:

8
rural school districts

33k
students

20
higher ed, industry, and community partners

By pooling resources and designing with students and families at the heart of the solution, EARCA demonstrates how regional pathways can expand opportunity, strengthen rural vitality, and address urgent workforce needs—providing a model for other regions and industries to follow.

THE BLUEPRINT

Alabama's Cybersecurity Pathways offer a blueprint for states and regions across the country.

Read the full report to learn how Alabama's Cybersecurity Pathways demonstrates a model for addressing national workforce shortages. This Initiative creates opportunities for all learners to attain high-demand careers and contribute to regional economic resilience.
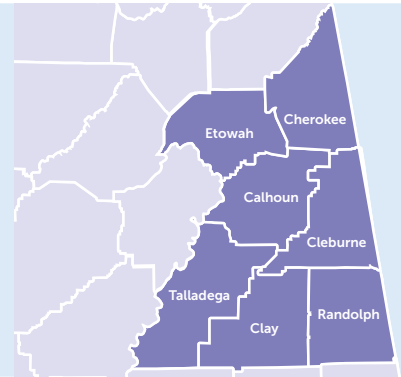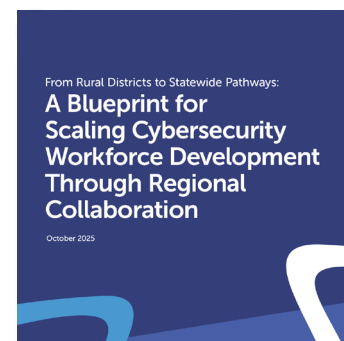
In this report, you'll find:

An overview of the Cybersecurity Pathways initiative in Alabama

A scalable framework for building cross-sector pathways

A theory of action with the policy and practice levers necessary to support statewide replication

A roadmap to extend this approach beyond cybersecurity into other high-demand industries

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