

SECTION: Gadsden State Community College History  
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## GADSDEN STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### HISTORY

Present-day Gadsden State Community College began with the merger of Alabama Technical College (originally the Alabama School of Trades), Gadsden State Technical Institute, Gadsden State Junior College, and Harry M. Ayers State Technical College.

One of the initial founding institutions of Gadsden State is Alabama Technical College. Established in 1925 as the Alabama School of Trades, it was the first state-operated trade school in the south and is the oldest of Gadsden State's campuses. In 1973, the Alabama School of Trades was renamed Alabama Technical College. Now, it is the home to several of Gadsden State's technical programs, the One Stop Center, the Joe Ford Center, and the Alabama Technology Network. This campus is known as East Broad Campus.

Gadsden State Technical Institute began in 1960 as the Gadsden Vocational Trade School, a private vocational training school for African Americans. It was founded by Eugene N. Prater, director of the Veterans Continuation Program for Negroes, in response to discontentment expressed by black veterans of Etowah County for being denied admission to the all-white Alabama School of Trades. Currently, it is known as the Valley Street Campus and houses the Construction Technology Program, HVACR Program, Certified Nursing Assistant Program, Diagnostic Medical Sonography Program, and several academic courses. The U.S. Department of Education designated this institution as a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in 1997.

Gadsden State Junior College was established in 1965 by an act of the Alabama State Legislature during the administration of Gov. George C. Wallace. The course offerings included professional programs, such as architecture, dentistry, journalism, law, medicine and teacher education, as well as technical programs in management, nursing, secretarial science and data processing. It is currently identified as the Wallace Drive Campus of Gadsden State and is home to academic courses, the Inzer Student Center, Fowler Residence Hall, Wallace Hall Fine Arts Center, and Beck Gymnasium & Conference Center.

Harry M. Ayers State Technical College was founded as a trade school by an act of the Alabama State Legislature on May 3, 1963. In 1972, the institution was designated as a technical college offering associate degrees and certificate programs in such fields as accounting, automotive body repair, carpentry, and cosmetology. It is now known as the Ayers Campus of Gadsden State Community College.

Present-day Gadsden State Community College began with the merger of Alabama Technical College, Gadsden State Technical Institute, and Gadsden State Junior College on February 28, 1985. The merger was recommended by the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education. At the time, a department

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within the Alabama State Department of Education and under the governance of the Alabama State Board of Education. The merger of the three institutions eliminated duplication of courses. To further eliminate duplication of courses, the consolidation of Gadsden State and Ayers State was completed on July 8, 2003, becoming the Ayers Campus as we know it today.

The Joe M. Ford Center for Economic Development located on the East Broad Campus was the result of a collaboration between Gadsden State Community College and Jacksonville State University. Construction began on the building during the fall semester of 2002 and it was dedicated on May 10, 2004. The joint project between GSCC and JSU was established to serve as an education and economic development resource for business, industry, government, and economic developers. Today Gadsden State Community College is the only occupant of the building.

In August 2002, Gadsden State Cherokee was opened as an instructional site in response to community and governmental efforts to meet the growing educational needs in the region. A new multi-level complex was opened in August 2008, where Gadsden State Cherokee now offers an expanded list of courses for students wishing to earn an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution. Gadsden State Cherokee also houses the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce and a multi-purpose 2,500-seat arena.

In September 2015, the governance of Alabama's community colleges, including Gadsden State, was transferred from the Alabama State Department of Postsecondary Education, a division of the Alabama State Department of Education, governed by the Alabama State Board of Education, to a newly created state entity called the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) governed by its own board of trustees.

In 2015, the One Stop Center opened on the East Broad Campus creating a new home for student services including admissions, counseling, advising, registration, financial aid, business office, records, testing, and bookstore. The next round of campus updates took place between 2017 and 2020 and included the renovation of Allen Hall on the Wallace Drive Campus, construction of a new 57,000 square foot science building on the East Broad Campus, and a 21,000 square foot addition to the Cheaha Center on the Ayers Campus.

In 2023, Gadsden State created the first police department in the College's history that serves all five campuses. Having sworn police officers on the College's campuses increases the level of protection for the college community.

In 2020, nearing the centennial anniversary of the Alabama School of Trades (1925-2025), Gadsden State submitted a proposal for the creation of an Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) under the ACCS ASPIRE 2030 initiative. ASPIRE, which stands for "Achieving Systemwide Potential through Increased Resources and Engagement," stemmed from a statewide bond issue passed by the Alabama Legislature in 2020. The initiative's aim was to provide funding for educational facility upgrades and new construction

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across Alabama. The AMC's development was guided by committees comprising Gadsden State employees and partners from K-12 education, government, business, industry, nonprofits, and economic development organizations. Gadsden State's proposal for the AMC was selected and on February 21, 2023, construction began on the \$24 million 50,000 square foot facility on the East Broad Campus. The AMC opened on June 12, 2024.

Between 2021 and 2024, Inzer/Meadows Student Center, Fowler Hall, Naylor Hall, Bevill Hall, and Helderman Hall were all renovated.

In 2024, Gadsden State announced a major renovation of the Wallace Hall Fine Arts Center and broke ground on the construction of a new baseball and softball complex, both on the Wallace Drive Campus.

Today, Gadsden State Community College offers over 70 programs that lead to associate degrees or certificates and serves the following geographic areas: Calhoun County, Cherokee County (all but northern one-sixth), Cleburne County, Etowah County, and St. Clair County (northeastern third).