

HOLSHOUSER

LEGISLATORS RETREAT

2023 ISSUE BRIEF

STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Access to Early Care and Learning

Access to high-quality early learning environments is critical for both young children and for our workforce. In North Carolina, over 5,400 licensed early care and learning programs served 217,094 children in September 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on access, with these numbers reflecting a loss of 291 sites (five percent) and 28,355 slots (11.5 percent) since February 2020 due to program closures, health concerns, and staff shortages.

Impact on the Business Sector

The child care industry is vital to states' economic success. In 2019, the U.S. [child care industry](#) produced a total revenue of \$47.5 billion and generated an additional \$52.1 billion in "spillover" (output) in other industries for a total economic impact of \$99.3 billion. This level of economic impact is comparable to industries such as medical and diagnostic labs (\$47.2 billion), spectator sports (\$46 billion), and pipeline transportation (\$44.5 billion).

Without child care, employees with young children may reduce hours and productivity or leave the workforce altogether. Due to lack of access to child care, [North Carolina businesses are losing \\$579. million](#) annually in current and future revenue. Nationwide, [inadequate child care](#) costs working parents an estimated \$37 billion a year in lost income and costs businesses more than \$13 billion a year in lost productivity. Furthermore, when child care and schools closed during the pandemic, roughly [\\$700. billion was lost in revenue and productivity](#), equivalent to about 3.5 percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP).

When companies offer child care benefits, they see increased employee retention and loyalty, improved productivity, and a better workplace environment. States are exploring innovative strategies to increase access to high-quality early care and learning to recruit and retain employees.

01. **Michigan** | The [MI Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Program](#) is a public/private partnership sharing the cost of child care equally among employers, employees, and the state.

02. **Kentucky** | [KY House Bill 499](#) establishes the Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership Fund to match employer child care benefits with state dollars for employees earning at or below the state median income level. In addition, to stabilize the workforce, Kentucky leveraged relief funds to establish a child care subsidy [categorical eligibility](#) criterion for child care employees.

03. **Florida** | The [Florida School Readiness Provider Match Program](#) is designed to give different sectors, including private businesses, the opportunity to provide child care reimbursements for employees earning at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

Business leaders and policymakers can capitalize on the economic benefits of early care and learning by investing in measures that support working families and their children. Investing in quality early childhood programs produces positive outcomes for children, families, and the state.

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

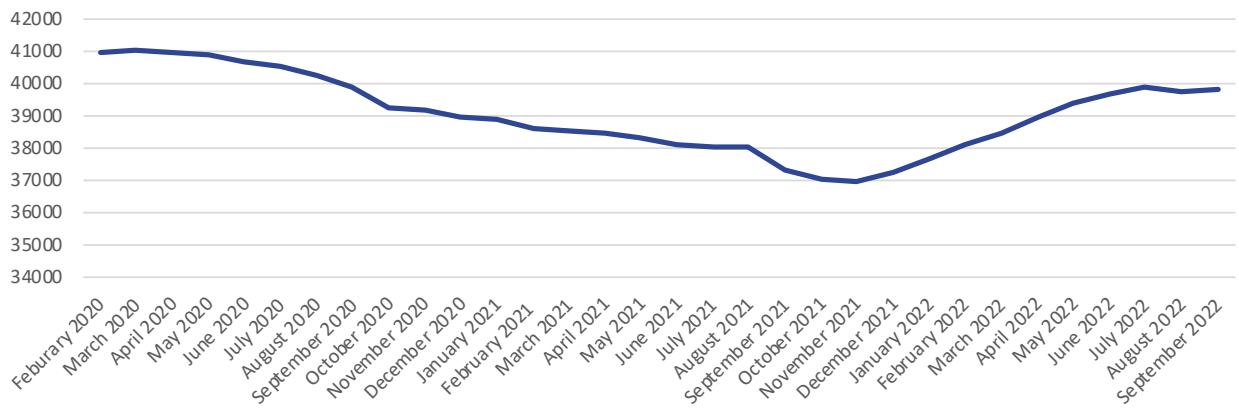
- In what ways is access to child care impacting North Carolina's workforce readiness?
- How can the state better partner with businesses and child care centers to help make child care more affordable and accessible?
- What additional funding sources might be available to provide public dollars in support of a public-private match to support employee access to child care?

NORTH CAROLINA'S EARLY CARE AND LEARNING WORKFORCE

Turnover and workforce shortages have plagued North Carolina's early care and learning network. Many early childhood educators – especially those employed within child care settings – are underpaid, and have no retirement benefits, sick leave, or health insurance. Early in the pandemic, a sizable number



Total Early Childhood Staff, NC, February 2020 to September 2022



Source

of early childhood educators experienced (at least temporary) unemployment as a result of program closures due to illness or staffing shortages. Some programs were even closed permanently, particularly those [dependent on tuition](#) support from families.

Workforce Shortages

Like many states, North Carolina has long struggled to maintain a strong early care and learning workforce. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges. Nationally, [143,000](#) child care jobs, or about 14 percent, were lost between February 2020 and November 2021 – the height of the pandemic. Thanks to the quick action taken by the state to stabilize the workforce, North Carolina fared better than the national averages with a ten percent loss in staff working in licensed early care and learning programs during that period. With the support of COVID relief funds, early childhood educators are returning to the field, but as funds run out within the year, providers will be left without the critical supports they depend on to stay open and retain staff.

As of September 2022, North Carolina's early childhood workforce consisted of approximately [39,781](#) professionals, down from about 41,000 just prior to the pandemic. The net loss between February 2020 and September 2022 is 1,180 early childhood educators; however, at its highest point, North Carolina had lost over 4,000 teachers, or almost 10 percent.

Building the Early Childhood Educator Pipeline

Young children are best served by an educated workforce. Entry points into the early childhood field include high school career and technical education (CTE) programs, community colleges, four-year institutions of

higher education (IHEs) and apprenticeship programs. While these pathways create a professional pipeline that allows new educators to enter the field,



WAGE\$	61 Counties with access to WAGE\$, 2021	\$8.1 million Allocated by Smart Start for WAGE\$ salary supplements, 2021	4,018 Early childhood educators receiving supplements, 2021	14% Turnover rate for WAGE\$ recipients, 2021
AWARD\$ Plus	100 (88 participating) Counties with access to AWARD\$+, 2021	\$3.1 million Allocated AWARD\$+ salary supplements, 2021	1,337 Early childhood educators receiving supplements, 2021	16% Turnover rate for AWARD\$+ recipients

Source: [Source](#)

some higher education leaders are [reluctant to promote early childhood coursework](#) due to the persistently low wages graduates find in the field.

Between 2001 and 2019, North Carolina made great strides in building an educated early childhood workforce, with [59 percent](#) of early childhood educators having completed a relevant degree or coursework.

There are a number of efforts underway to strengthen the pipeline of early child care educators. The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) is offering [coursework online](#) as well as [scholarship programs](#). The Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) at the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and NCCCS are also working to create more long-term strategies by expanding high school CTE programs, awarding college credit based on work experience, and creating a fast-track certificate program reducing the time needed to earn minimum education requirements.

Compensation Strategies

[Research](#) has shown that pay incentives spread over time reduce turnover in early childhood classrooms. Many states, including North Carolina, are implementing direct wage supplements tied to education in order to enhance compensation of the early care and education workforce.

CHILD CARE WAGE\$ PROGRAM AND INFANT-TODDLER AWARD\$+

The [Child Care WAGE\\$ program](#) is funded through local Smart Start Partnerships and DCDEE. Local Smart Start Partnerships chose to allocate funds toward WAGE\$ for early childhood educators working with children birth to five in the counties they serve. DCDEE funds the Child Care Services Association to

support administration (e.g., application processing, approval, payment, and monitoring) through federal funds. Because local Smart Start Partnerships allocate funds to WAGE\$, each Partnership determines eligibility and supplement criteria which vary across the state.

[Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\\$ Plus](#) provides education-based salary supplements to early childhood educators working full-time with children birth to age two. Unlike WAGE\$, AWARD\$+ is funded statewide and administered solely by Child Care Services Association.

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

- Is North Carolina's current early care and learning landscape able to support the access needs of families?
- How can North Carolina build upon current programs such as WAGE\$, AWARD\$, and Stabilization Grants to retain child care teachers?
- What are additional programs and pathways that the state can explore to encourage entry into the early childhood workforce?



BUILDING IMPACTFUL K-12 ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Accountability systems enable states to measure and hold districts, schools, and educators accountable for raising student achievement, and provide education stakeholders with data on where additional supports and improvements may be necessary. Under the federal [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA), all states are required to hold schools accountable for the achievement of all students.

North Carolina's Accountability System

North Carolina's school performance is based on an A to F letter grade system, calculated using a formula that considers both achievement and growth scores. Under the current system, 80 percent of a school's letter grade is weighted on test scores and other student achievement data, while the remaining 20 percent is calculated by comparing student growth relative to expectations. Student achievement benchmarks [include](#):

The growth component of the accountability system uses an [Education Value-Added Assessment System](#) (EVAAS) model that combines current and previous student assessment data to measure changes in student achievement.



Achievement Benchmarks	School Quality or Student Success Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Annual end-of-grade mathematics and reading assessments in grades three through eight and science assessments in grades five and eight (Level 3 and above).■ Annual end-of-course assessments in NC Math 1 or NC Math 3 (for students who took NC Math 1 in grade eight or prior) and English II (Level 3 and above), included in achievement and growth.■ Percentage of students identified as English learners who meet the progress standard on the English Proficiency assessment.■ Percentage of students who graduate within four years of entering ninth-grade high school (Standard [Four-Year] Cohort Graduation Rate).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Growth for elementary and middle schools (mathematics, reading and science); high school growth is included in the achievement indicator (reading and mathematics).■ Annual end-of-course assessment in biology for high schools (schools with grade nine or higher).■ Percentage of 12th grade students who complete NC Math 3 with a passing grade.■ Percentage of 12th grade students who achieve the minimum score required for admission into a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina on the ACT (composite score of 19) or who meet the Silver Certificate or higher on the WorkKeys assessment.

National Approaches to Accountability and Assessment Reform

Significant variation exists between states regarding how they evaluate and measure school or district effectiveness. Under ESSA, ratings must measure student academic achievement, student growth, progress of English language proficiency, and graduation rates (when applicable), as well as an indicator of school quality and student success (SQSS), such as chronic absenteeism, school climate, and college and career readiness. States have autonomy to choose which SQSS metrics to include. ESSA also requires states to assess students every year from third through eighth grade, once in high school in both mathematics and English language arts, and once in science during elementary, middle, and high school. States may also consider precursor indicators, which aim to measure academic achievement, or school quality and student success indicators. The flexibility of the SQSS metric under ESSA leaves room for states to think innovatively about what student success may look like, both in and outside of the classroom.

ASSESSMENT ALTERNATIVES

While states are required to conduct a formalized assessment for students under ESSA, there has been a dramatic push in recent years to revise state assessments with assessment alternatives. Descriptions of each alternative are in the table below.

The Future of Accountability in North Carolina

Under Operation Polaris, Superintendent Catherine Truitt's four-year strategic plan to support public schools, the NC Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) has convened a Testing and Accountability Advisory group charged with exploring how the state's current assessment and accountability system assesses students and schools, as well as whether opportunities exist to restructure, improve, and potentially reform the accountability system statewide. Under the newly proposed accountability model, the system will prioritize growth using a statewide "graduate portrait" that supports a competency-based approach, or one where students work at their own pace to master skills or display subject area competencies.

In an effort to ensure that all North Carolinians have access to a sound, basic education, NC DPI

ASSESSMENT ALTERNATIVE	STATE/NATIONAL EXAMPLES
<i>College Readiness Assessments</i>	Following the passage of <u>HB 15-1323</u> in 2015, <u>Colorado partnered with College Board</u> to require the PSAT for 9th and 10th graders as well as the SAT for 11th grade. Since these assessments are aligned with Colorado State Standards, they are offered <u>in place of</u> the Colorado Measures of Academic Success.
<i>Performance Based Assessments</i>	In 2005, <u>New Hampshire</u> policymakers mandated that all high schools measure credits according to students' mastery of material, creating the first statewide effort to create a competency-based education system. In 2015, state and local leaders introduced an alternative assessment and accountability system called the <u>Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE)</u> , which includes a "common complex performance task" for each grade and subject.
<i>Sampling Models</i>	Matrix sampling provides students with a randomly selected subset of test items to reduce test administration, scoring time and costs while still gaining an overall estimate of student performance. Various types of matrix sampling have been used in large-scale assessments, including by the <u>National Assessment of Educational Progress</u> , or NAEP.
<i>Test Length and Frequency</i>	Pennsylvania <u>reduced</u> testing time by an average of 20 percent for students in grades three through eight and by 25 percent for the Commonwealth's youngest students. The Commonwealth accomplished this reduction by including it in its <u>ESSA Consolidated State Plan</u> .



has established the following SMART goals for its accountability system reform work.

- Build a statewide portrait of a graduate to be used by districts and schools to frame local efforts and define student success. Fully deploy in the 2022-23 academic year.
- Outline a multi-measure model of student success including recommended growth and achievement weights, and in compliance with federal guidelines, no later than June 30, 2022.
- Develop a competency-based model and implementation methodology aligned to the established content standards, to be deployed in the academic year 2023-24.
- Present a revised School Report Card template by December 2022. Pilot in the academic year 2022-23 and fully deploy in 2023-24.
- Use North Carolina Personalized Assessment Tool (NCPAT) data to refine and operationalize the multi-measure model of student success, components of the revised School Report Card, and the development of the competency-based assessment model.

Stakeholder Priorities. As part of the ongoing conversation statewide around reforming North Carolina's existing accountability system, [EdNC](#), in partnership with DPI, conducted a statewide survey in 2022 of over 26,000 stakeholders to better understand stakeholder priorities. These responses are being used by the Advisory Group to inform their work, and the entirety of the survey results may be found [here](#).

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

- What assessment alternatives or metrics are other states using that North Carolina could look to incorporate in its accountability system?
- What more can North Carolina do to reduce testing burdens on students and families including cost, frequency, and access?
- How can the state further capture and incorporate stakeholder needs and priorities for accountability reform?

EDUCATOR LICENSURE REFORM

With [teacher quality](#) being the most important school-based factor influencing student growth and achievement, high-quality teacher preparation is essential for all teachers. In addition to teacher preparation, teacher certification and licensure are all [positively correlated](#) with student performance. North Carolina requires all teachers to hold a [professional educator's license](#) to serve in traditional public schools. Currently, new teachers can enter the teaching profession through three different pathways:

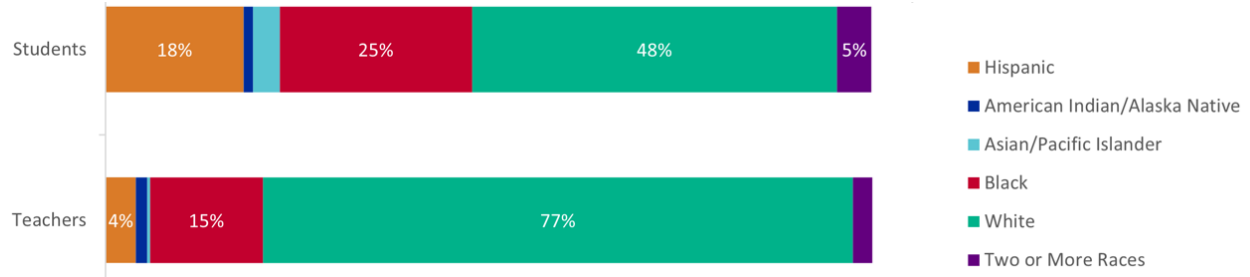
- **Traditional Educator Preparation Program.** Teacher candidates can attend one of the 51 approved traditional educator preparation programs (EPPs) based at institutions of higher education in North Carolina. North Carolina also honors approved EPPs from all states.
- **Alternative Preparation Program.** Teacher candidates may seek an alternative program such as Teach for America or a district-based certification program that provides a flexible route to licensure. This pathway does not require candidates to be enrolled full-time.
- **Teacher Residency.** Teacher candidates who already hold a bachelor's degree, have been hired by a school district, and are enrolled in an educator preparation program are eligible for this pathway. Certification through this pathway takes one year.

In addition, North Carolina has set specific testing requirements prior to obtaining a professional educator license. Teacher candidates are required to pass both content exam(s) and performance/ pedagogy assessment(s). Furthermore, under North Carolina's current system, teachers are paid based on their years of experience.

Though North Carolina provides various pathways to seek licensure, the state continues to struggle to recruit and retain a [high-quality and diverse educator workforce](#). Barriers such as educator certification exams and postsecondary access and preparedness continue to make the path to becoming a teacher in North Carolina challenging – especially for teacher candidates of color.



Total Early Childhood Staff, NC, February 2020 to September 2022

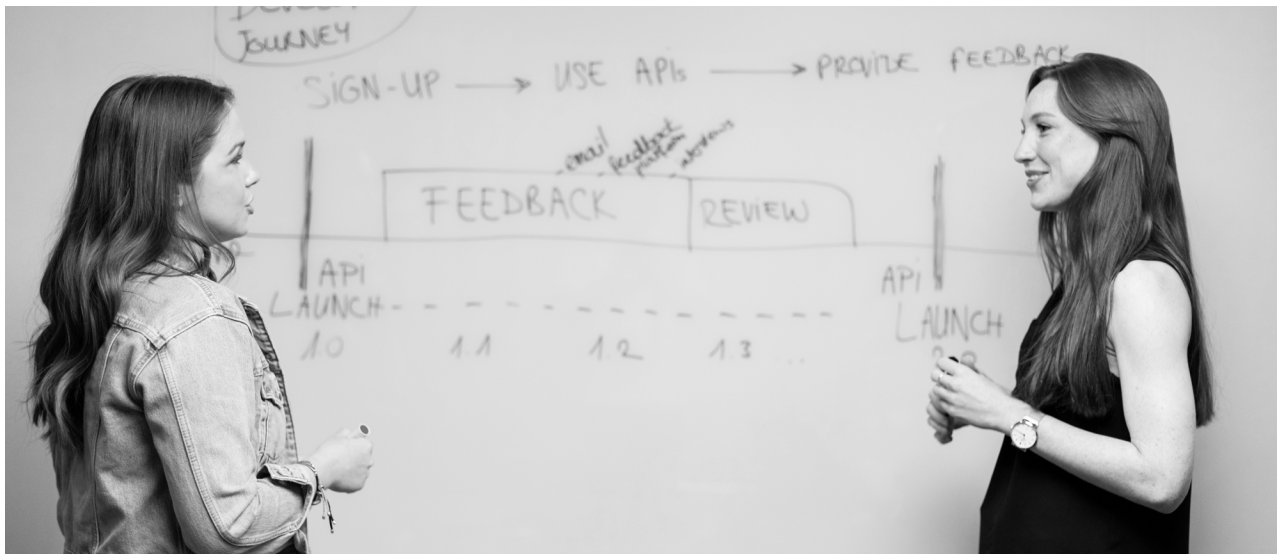


The NC Education Human Capital Roundtable, a multi-sector coalition of North Carolina educational leaders, initiated the work of addressing teacher recruitment, retention, and quality concerns through evaluation of North Carolina's current licensure system. A thorough evaluation indicated that the current system has become overly complex, and though it offers a combination of license options, there is no clear indication of how they all work together. Furthermore, a lack of advancement opportunities for teachers to progress professionally and lack of support, incentives and fair compensation have also been identified as barriers to entering the teaching workforce in North Carolina.

In 2021, the State Board of Education requested The Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC) to lead the work of reimagining North Carolina's teacher pipeline. Over the past year, PEPSC has held over 50 meetings studying and making recommendations to reform teacher licensure. PEPSC and the State Board of Education continue to work together to develop a recommendation on next steps to be made to the General Assembly in 2023.

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

- How can North Carolina better align the three pathways to teacher licensure to ensure that every classroom has a highly effective and qualified teacher?
- How have other states framed their educator licensure system to combat recruitment and retention concerns, especially those related to diverse educators?
- What metrics should North Carolina consider to strengthen the educator pipeline?



EXPANDING THE EDUCATOR PIPELINE THROUGH TEACHER RESIDENCY

As North Carolina and other states continue to grapple with teacher shortages and the need to diversify the teaching profession, many are adopting strategies to increase access to and reduce the cost of teacher preparation. Some states have invested funds to better support teachers navigating existing entry routes to the profession, using both state dollars and federal stimulus resources to provide scholarships and other financial incentives to educators looking to enter or advance in the field. North Carolina currently offers a [residency license pathway](#) into the profession for mid-career professionals who have a bachelor's degree in a non-education field in which candidates must be enrolled in an educator preparation program while they teach.

Teacher Residency Programs

[Teacher residency models](#) provide an alternative to full-time teacher preparation programs based at IHEs. Similar to a medical residency program, teacher residencies are partnerships between schools or school district(s) and IHEs in which teaching candidates have the opportunity to work alongside a mentor teacher for at least one year before becoming the teacher of record. Typically, teacher residents already hold a bachelor's degree, and they work to obtain their master's degree during their yearlong clinical experience. Ultimately, teacher residencies serve the purpose of providing residents with strong and adequate preparation experiences. Moreover, residencies typically pay teacher candidates during the residency year; in return, teacher residents commit to teaching within the same district for a period of time after their residency ends. With North Carolina seeking to create a strong pipeline into the teaching profession, this alternative route seeks to reach a broader pool of candidates. In fact, [32 percent](#) of all North Carolina teacher candidates completed their training through an alternative teacher preparation program in 2021.

In addition to providing teacher residents with financial support and ongoing mentoring and coaching from an expert teacher, research indicates* several key components to [strong and impactful residency programs](#). Well-designed teacher residency programs also entail strong district/EPP partnerships,

integrated coursework with clinical practice, and co-teaching clinical practice to support the rigorous development and preparation of teacher candidates.

TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

An expansion of the teacher residency concept, [teacher apprenticeships](#) also combine coursework and on-the-job experience in an attempt to reduce the cost of earning a teaching degree while providing candidates with crucial time in the classroom during their preparation. Apprentices also receive a wage for their time in the classroom and ultimately earn a bachelor's degree and/or license in teaching. In January 2022, the [Tennessee Department of Education \(TDOE\) announced](#) a new [grow-your own](#) model - a free [Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship program](#) between schools districts and EPPs to address their teacher shortages and develop a teacher pipeline. The U.S. Department of Labor approved their Teacher Apprenticeship program - the [first registered apprenticeship](#) for the teaching profession in the country.

Benefits of Teacher Residency Programs

TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Teacher residency programs aim to improve the effectiveness of new teachers by providing teacher candidates with extensive and rigorous coursework, on-the-job training, and teacher mentorship. Ongoing research illustrates the positive impact these models can have on addressing the issue of inadequate training of new teachers. In addition, emerging research shows [promising trends around the potential advancement of student achievement](#). Educational theory and pedagogy coursework, paired with practical teaching experience, provides teacher residents with a [cohesive experience](#) as they develop into high-quality educators.

TEACHER RETENTION

Teacher residency programs demonstrate promising trends in teachers at high-need schools, showing retention rates nearly twice that of the average teacher. Studies show that teachers who are prepared through residency programs tend to stay in the classroom longer, with [80 to 90 percent](#) of graduates continuing to teach in the same district after three years. The results of this healthy pipeline of teachers yields to a diversified recruitment process, as well as the rigorous and intentional clinical preparation provided within this preparation pathway. Teacher residencies often



recruit candidates who are reflective of the diversity of the school community and those who desire to work in underserved schools, resulting in teacher residency candidates being committed and dedicated to serving in these schools following the end of their residency.

TEACHER DIVERSITY

With an increasingly diverse student population in our schools, it is imperative that our teaching workforce reflects the diversity of the students they serve. Teacher residencies tend to attract people of color at much higher rates; according to the United States Department of Education, 62 percent of teacher residents identify as people of color compared to 22 percent of teachers nationally. Since teacher residency models are designed to serve specific student populations and communities, this pathway strategically addresses efforts to recruit candidates who live within these communities. Teacher residency programs provide the opportunity to directly transform the teacher pipeline within communities of color.

Cost of Teacher Residency Programs

Teacher residency programs are often more affordable than traditional, IHE-based teacher preparation pathways as a result of the financial assistance offered. Residences typically offer financial assistance to residents through scholarships, stipends, grants, or tuition discounts. The average cost per resident within the National Center for Teacher Residences network is \$15,000, with residents being eligible for financial aid through their partnered graduate program.

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

- What incentives can North Carolina offer public universities and community colleges to ensure we meet our 2 million by 2030 goal?
- How can North Carolina build upon current initiatives to decrease time to degree completion and make postsecondary education more affordable to all?
- What additional data should the state collect to provide a full picture of workforce needs in North Carolina?

MEETING NORTH CAROLINA'S GROWING WORKFORCE NEEDS

With nearly 90 percent of North Carolina employers reporting vacant positions in the past 12 months, meeting local and state workforce needs is more critical than ever. Further, 81 percent of employers experienced difficult hiring within the past 12 months - a nearly 60 percent increase from 2019. For both entry-level and above-entry-level positions, employers cited the number of applicants as the largest barrier to hiring, followed by employability skills, low pay, soft skills, experience, and education. Across industries, more hospitality and health care employers are hiring in comparison to their industry peers.

Increasing the number of students participating in higher education is necessary to ensure there is an educated workforce that can meet the needs of the future economy. After the 2008 economic recession, over 95 percent of the jobs created during the recovery were filled by workers who had earned a higher education degree or certificate. The need for high-quality workers is growing, with an estimate that by 2027 over 70 percent of jobs in the U.S. will require some form of postsecondary degree or credential. Higher education continues to play a vital role in ensuring access to life and family-sustaining employment and wages.

Thanks in large part to North Carolina's longstanding commitment to higher education, the state has developed an infrastructure that provides students with some of the most high-quality postsecondary options in the country. However, a common misconception within higher education is that four-year degrees are the only credentials of value. North Carolina's various postsecondary pathways, including two- and four-year degrees, early college and dual enrollment programs, short-term certificates and credentials, and apprenticeship programs continue to ensure North Carolinians are able to access higher education opportunities and pathways to family sustaining wages.

Aligning Postsecondary Education to Workforce Needs

Not only must we increase the number of students who attain a postsecondary degree or credential, we must also ensure that these credentials align with the workforce needs of the state. Shortening the time it takes to attain a degree, lowering the cost of higher education, and re-engaging students with some college, but no degree/credential are critical to ensuring a robust workforce.



SHORTENING THE TIME TO ATTAIN A DEGREE OR CREDENTIAL

In 2011, the North Carolina General Assembly established the [Career and College Promise \(CCP\)](#) program. CCP provides high school students the ability to take college credit bearing coursework through the UNC system and the NC Community College System at a subsidized rate. CCP offers students three pathways to choose from:

- **College Transfer** | College transfer pathways (CTP) provide tuition-free course credits that will transfer seamlessly to any UNC System or participating private college or university.
- **Career and Technical Education** | Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways provide tuition-free course credits toward a certificate, diploma, or state or industry-recognized workforce credential.
- **Cooperative Innovative High Schools** | Begin earning tuition-free college credits as a high school student by attending an approved Cooperative Innovative High School

Providing structured pathways into higher education can be a powerful strategy to help students overcome barriers related to access. Higher education leaders have also worked to develop both the [Comprehensive](#)



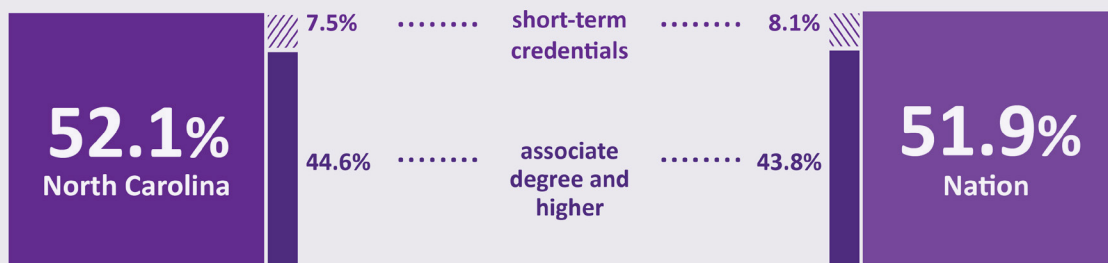
myFutureNC State Postsecondary Attainment Goal

Currently, North Carolina's attainment rate is [52.1 percent](#), with 44.6 percent of North Carolinians holding an associate's degree or higher and 7.5 percent holding a short-term credential. At this rate, North Carolina will fall short by at least [400,000](#) workers with the skills needed to fill the state's projected jobs' needs by 2030.

To that end, stakeholders from across North Carolina created the myFutureNC Commission. After the commission spent a year conducting

research and collecting input from experts across the state, myFutureNC set an ambitious statewide attainment goal: [2 million](#) North Carolinians – 66 percent – will attain a high-quality credential or degree by 2030.

For North Carolina to reach its goal by 2030, the state will need to not only maintain current rates of attainment, but also significantly increase the number of people who enroll in programs and gain postsecondary credentials.



[Articulation Agreement](#) (CAA) and the [Independent Comprehensive Articulation Agreement](#) (ICAA) frameworks that establish clear pathways for transfer students to succeed in higher education. However, more work is still needed to make these programs and resources available to all students across North Carolina.

LOWERING THE COST OF ATTENDING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

As of 2019, [less than 25 percent](#) of public four-year institutions were affordable for a student receiving a Pell grant, a federal subsidy awarded to undergraduate students who exhibit exceptional financial need. Students that choose to take out loans to cover the growing gap between tuition cost and financial aid often find themselves saddled with student loan debt. In the past several years, North Carolina has implemented several aid programs to help make postsecondary education more affordable.

■ [North Carolina Promise](#) | The North Carolina Promise was created by the state of North Carolina to provide students at Elizabeth City State University, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and Western Carolina University reduced student costs. Fayetteville State University joined the program in fall of 2022. All undergraduate in-state students pay \$500 per semester and undergraduate out-of-state students pay \$2,500 per semester.

■ [Consolidation & Simplification of Public Higher Education State Grants](#) | Previously, the state funded three financial aid programs: Community College Grant, UNC Need-Based Grant, and Education Lottery Scholarship. However, these separate systems had different eligibility requirements, different calculations for determining amount of aid, and funded through different sources. Legislation during the 2022 session consolidated these grants into a single need-based financial aid program that is simpler, more user friendly, and allows students and their families to learn about their options for funding higher education earlier in the process.

RE-ENGAGING LEARNERS ACROSS THE CONTINUUM

As of 2019, [41 percent](#) of North Carolinians ages 18-24 enrolled in a postsecondary institution, ranking the state 28th in the nation. However, with [13.4 percent](#) of North Carolinians ages 25-64 having completed some college but not earning a credential, and an additional [23.9 percent](#) with only a high school diploma, the state

has a number of adult learners who are not accessing higher education pathways.

- In 2021, The John M. Belk Endowment funded [NC Reconnect](#), a pilot program to recruit adult learners at five North Carolina Community Colleges. The program utilizes data tracking to call, text, and email individuals who had completed at least 50 percent of a degree or credential with the goal of re-enrolling them. The 2022 budget passed by the General Assembly allocated funds to expand the initiative to five additional community colleges.
- In 2021, the NC General Assembly appropriated \$97 million to launch [Project Kitty Hawk](#) to recruit, retain, and support adult learners to the state's public four-year universities. The program offerings will be closely aligned to workforce needs and courses will be designed to meet the unique needs of adult learners.
- In August 2022, the UNC System announced a [new statewide initiative](#) to offer one-on-one coaching to help students with some college, but no degree/credential complete their studies. The program partners with InsideTrack to reach and coach students, after piloting this approach initially three years ago.

Guiding Questions for North Carolina

- What incentives can North Carolina offer public universities and community colleges to ensure we meet our 2 million by 2030 goal?
- How can North Carolina build upon current initiatives to decrease time to degree completion and make postsecondary education more affordable to all?
- What additional data should the state collect to provide a full picture of workforce needs in North Carolina?





4000 Centregreen Way | Suite 301
Cary, NC 27513 | p: 984.377.5200

hunt-institute.org | info@hunt-institute.org