



# FRAMING

## THE WORK AHEAD



### 4 FOCUS AREAS:

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

ACCESS TO LIFELONG EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

PREPARATION FOR EDUCATION, CAREER & LIFE

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

**ATTAINMENT  
GOAL 2030**

*Reaching two million by 2030 will move North Carolina from middle-of-the-pack status to the forefront of attainment in our country. Ambition alone will not get us there; our ambition must be coupled with coordinated, long-term actions across multiple sectors.*

Therefore, to provide a starting point for the development of a *Plan of Action* for our state that will help us to meet our goal, the Commission recommends four *Focus Areas*—Education and Workforce Alignment; Access to Lifelong Educational Opportunities; Preparation for Education, Career, and Life; and



Comprehensive Support Systems—along with sixteen more specific cross-sector *Priorities* within those Focus Areas to inform our work.<sup>20</sup>

The Commission developed these Focus Areas and Priorities over the course of its five Commission meetings (November 2017 through December 2018). Subject-matter and technical experts, policy briefs and other papers and surveys commissioned by myFutureNC, and feedback and information derived from myFutureNC’s statewide Listening Tour all contributed to the development of each component; we include illustrative examples from each of these sources throughout this section.<sup>21</sup>

## I. EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

**KEYWORDS:** *Alignment across Education Sectors (Pre-K, K-12, postsecondary); Education-Workforce Alignment; Education-Community Alignment; Community-Workforce Alignment*

A dramatic increase in postsecondary attainment in North Carolina will require closer alignment across and within education sectors, as well as better alignment between those sectors and the business community. Alignment begins with development of a deeper, mutual understanding across sectors of what “college and career readiness” means. Each education sector must build on that understanding by structuring its curricula and supports to ensure that students who work to master the knowledge and skills embedded in those curricula are prepared to succeed at the next level. In particular, in order to achieve higher postsecondary matriculation rates and



**I BELIEVE A NEW EDUCATION MODEL FOR PRE-SCHOOL TO COLLEGE HAS TO DEVELOP TO ADDRESS ... LEARNING GAPS, COLLEGE COMPLETION, & CAREER PLACEMENT. [IT] SHOULD BE A COLLABORATION WITH MULTIPLE BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT & OTHER NON-PROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT PARTNERSHIPS IN EACH COMMUNITY.**

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

20. For connections between these Priorities and the benchmark indicators and outcome measures detailed in the previous section, please see Appendix C; for connections between these Priorities and the work of other recent and current North Carolina education commissions, please see Appendix D.

21. All resources commissioned by myFutureNC are summarized in Appendices E, F, G, and H, and they are available in full online at [www.myfuturenc.org](http://www.myfuturenc.org); readers are encouraged to review those materials for greater depth of coverage of the data that inform each Focus Area and Priority. For more details about the process for developing these Focus Areas and Priorities, please see Appendix A.

to reduce remediation, high schools and colleges must cooperate to clearly identify and communicate postsecondary readiness standards. In addition, postsecondary leaders must work together to mitigate loss of credits due to cross-institutional misalignment or inadequate transfer guidance. Finally, the entire education system must collaborate with the business community to ensure that the skills and competencies taught match the skills and competencies employers seek.

Each education sector has made great strides in many of these areas in recent years, but only by closer coordination of efforts across all levels of education can North Carolina fully address the needs of every student, identify and eliminate systemic differences in achievement that limit educational attainment, and provide every student with a seamless path from preschool to gainful employment.

## 1. ALIGN ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS ACROSS P-12 AND POSTSECONDARY

*Broaden and improve academic alignment within and between P-12 and postsecondary by continuing to refine current and, when necessary, establishing new cross-sector partnerships, policies, and processes that support clear, understandable, and shared academic expectations as students transition between education sectors.*

As we noted in an earlier section, Listening Tour participants across the state spoke often of the differences between the strong relationships among the various education sectors as they appear in diagrams versus the somewhat less consistent relationships as they tend to play out in day-to-day interactions. In the current system, participants contended, educators struggle to prepare students to achieve long-term academic success because their performance typically is measured using within-



IF YOU WANT . . . SMOOTH TRANSITION[S WITHIN] K-12, THEN . . . K-5 HAS TO KNOW WHAT IS NEEDED FOR 6-8. IF YOU WANT A SMOOTH TRANSITION BETWEEN 6-8 AND 9-12, THEN 6-8 HAS GOT TO KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED IN ORDER FOR A CHILD TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN 9-12. . . . **[Y]OU'VE GOT TO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS TO COME, NOT JUST KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE YOU ARE.**

— LISTENING TOUR PARTICIPANT

sector tools like standardized tests that emphasize specific and short-term outcomes rather than more global outcomes such as preparation for life after school (Antoszyk et al., 2018a). The end results of the lack of alignment across the major sectors are challenging academic disconnects or misalignments, with a consequent loss of some students from the pipeline. More than half of the EducationNC survey-takers identified the various high school-to-postsecondary moves as the ones for which they needed the most guidance (EdNC, 2018), but, as indicated in several other sections below, these academic disconnects are present at nearly every juncture.

## 2. ENSURE SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS ACROSS EDUCATION SECTORS

*Smoothing the procedural components of transitions—tasks that students and families must complete to move from one sector to the next, such as application processes—is equally as important as academic alignment. Review and revise policies and processes to ensure that student transitions within P-12 and between the pre-Kindergarten, K-12, and postsecondary education sectors are seamless. Focus in particular on the transitions into Kindergarten, between elementary, middle, and high school, and into postsecondary certificate and degree programs.*<sup>22</sup>

One of the keys to reaching our ambitious attainment goal will be ensuring that we eliminate some or all of the policy and paperwork barriers that keep new and returning students from smoothly transitioning between sectors. In 2016, nearly one-third of all UNC system students were transfers, most of whom were coming from community colleges, but the rate at which North Carolina students transfer from community college to UNC is well below the national average (about 24% within a six-year period, versus about 33% nationwide; D'Amico & Chapman, 2018).

Chief among the barriers that suppress transfer rates are admissions procedures and course credit transfer rules—the two barriers most often

22. For students with Associate's degrees, North Carolina has both a Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (between North Carolina Community Colleges (NCCC) and UNC System Schools) and an Independent Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (between NCCC and ICUs); the state can build upon these as it works toward broader, more streamlined articulation coverage (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018).



mentioned on the Listening Tour by students, parents, and administrators alike when discussing cross-sector transition. Students and parents felt that admissions requirements sometimes lack clarity and that credit transfer is not always standardized, predictable, or logical, sometimes resulting in course repetition at a cost of both time and money (Antoszyk et al., 2018b). The vast majority of Gallup poll respondents noted the importance of the ability to transfer credits—particularly when those credits are being transferred to a four-year college (Gallup, 2018).

### **3. DEVELOP MORE PATHWAYS FROM EDUCATION TO MEANINGFUL NORTH CAROLINA CAREERS**

*Alignment does not end at the postsecondary level. Ensure that P-12 and postsecondary sectors coordinate with employers to provide guided pathways that are industry-aligned and develop the knowledge, employability skills, and competencies students need to succeed in high-wage, high-demand jobs. Successful coordination will require development of accessible, clear, and streamlined processes for linking businesses with educators.<sup>23</sup>*

Only about one quarter of the respondents to the EducationNC survey (26%) believed that their educational opportunities were very well aligned with jobs available in their communities, and about the same proportion (25%) believed that their educational opportunities provided avenues for gaining needed work skills for available jobs (EdNC, 2018). As noted earlier, in order to position more people for better employment, the state not only must encourage more residents to develop a mindset that values postsecondary education in general, but also a mindset that values a wider array of career paths and postsecondary pathways that can help connect them to more meaningful careers (Antoszyk et al., 2018a). Expansion of a host of work-based learning models that help educators and businesses work together—from internships to co-ops to on-the-job training programs to apprenticeships—is a good place to start (Brown-Graham & Moga Bryant, 2018).

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23. A prime example of such a program is the Certified Career Pathways program, one of the NCWorks Commission's primary initiatives for developing sustainable talent pipelines for high-demand occupations; as of May 2018 there were 30 certified pathways (Brown-Graham & Moga Bryant, 2018).



## II. ACCESS TO LIFELONG EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**KEYWORDS:** *Access; Affordability; Responsiveness to Demographic Changes; Attentiveness to Local Needs*

Every state in the nation continues to grapple with cultural and structural barriers, both historical and current, that prevent many individuals from reaching their full potential. As North Carolina grows, meeting the needs of each of our residents from increasingly diverse backgrounds, preschool through workforce, is the key to talent development, economic competitiveness, innovation, and prosperity.

In particular, the state must prioritize strategies that intentionally create opportunities for every North Carolinian—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, background, age, location, or experience—to earn high-value degrees and credentials and pursue meaningful, high-wage, high-demand occupations. More broadly, our state will thrive when we ensure that every student<sup>24</sup> has access to high-quality child care and early education, effective public schools, and top-notch lifelong postsecondary opportunities. Only by doing so can we eliminate systemic barriers to achievement and attainment, prepare students for work that enables them to support their families, provide them with ongoing options for expanding their skills, and help them to maintain a fulfilling quality of life.

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24. Our use of the term “student” throughout this document is comprehensive, including any North Carolinian at any stage of life who accesses any of the educational opportunities available in our state.



## 1. ENSURE ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERY STUDENT AT EVERY LEVEL

*Dedicate the resources necessary to ensure that every student has access to high-quality, positive, and effective learning environments—challenging, academically robust educational settings that are staffed by competent, well-trained educators, have the resources necessary for supporting an effective instructional program, and in which students both believe they can succeed and feel a sense of belonging, encouragement, and support—from the earliest years of schooling through postsecondary, anywhere in the state.*

The challenges of providing a high-quality learning environment extend across the education continuum, and they can be physical, fiscal, and pedagogical in nature. Feedback from North Carolinians collected on behalf of the myFutureNC Commission highlights all three types of challenges. For example, almost half (48%) of the respondents to the EducationNC survey rated the school facilities in their communities as either fair or poor (EdNC, 2018). In addition, respondents to the Gallup poll most frequently identified funding as the biggest challenge facing K-12 schools in their communities (74%)—outpacing identification of any other challenge by 18 percentage points or more (Gallup, 2018)—and Listening Tour participants concurred (Antoszyk et al., 2018d). Finally, Gallup poll respondents indicated that North Carolina schools serve some students better than others, with nearly seven of ten identifying school as a good place for gifted students, but only a little more than four of ten saying the same for students with learning disabilities (Gallup, 2018). Listening Tour participants cited a lack of trained personnel as one of the main reasons why schools at every stage along the continuum sometimes struggle to provide environments in which the needs of all students can be met (Antoszyk et al., 2018d).



## 2. IMPROVE POSTSECONDARY ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

*Improve postsecondary affordability and increase accessibility by developing strategies not only to make access to postsecondary opportunities less expensive for families and more responsive to the needs of both new and returning students, but also to make delivery of those opportunities more efficient and more flexible for institutions.*

Relative to other states, many of North Carolina's postsecondary options are affordable, with support from the state ranking in the top ten nationally, and with less than half of all two-year and four-year students taking out education-related loans. When students do take loans, they tend to be for amounts that are well below national averages, with the average North Carolina debt per Bachelor's degree (about \$25,500)—private and public combined—ranking 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation (Robinson 2018).

Affordability relative to other states is not the same as *actual* affordability, however. Less than half (48%) of Gallup poll respondents were satisfied with the affordability of the state's two-year options, and even fewer were satisfied with the affordability of public and private four-year options (26% and 14%, respectively). In all cases, most respondents believed that the cost of a degree is an important factor in failure to complete a degree (Gallup, 2018), and North Carolina loan default rates are higher than the national average (Robinson, 2018). In addition, while many postsecondary institutions offer support services to help with matriculation, about one in five students who qualify for financial aid do not even apply (Edmunds, 2018). Increased financial aid guidance not only would help students and families determine how to pay for postsecondary education but also may help make that education seem more accessible (Antoszyk et al., 2018c; Edmunds, 2018).



### 3. STRENGTHEN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES

*Better prepare North Carolinians in our most economically distressed communities for higher-wage, high-demand employment opportunities by coordinating public sector and business community efforts to increase outreach and promote evidence-based policies and practices.*

The North Carolina Department of Commerce identifies the most economically distressed counties using a calculation that takes into consideration unemployment, household income, population growth, and property tax value.<sup>25</sup> The counties designated as most economically distressed are called Tier 1 counties. Among all respondents to the Gallup poll, those from Tier 1 counties were least likely to say that there are good jobs available for residents with professional certificates (15% versus 30% in Tier 3 counties), two-year degrees (19% versus 36%), or four-year degrees (24% versus 56%; Gallup, 2018). Similarly, while EducationNC survey participants across the state responded that the availability and quality of local job opportunities was either only “Poor” or “Fair” (57% and 54%, respectively), those responses typically were higher among participants from regions with more Tier 1 communities (EdNC, 2018).

Changing those perceptions is made even more difficult when schools in those counties struggle to provide consistent support to their students. While teacher attrition is a perennial challenge across North Carolina, it is highest in Tier 1 counties (Bastian, 2018), and postsecondary pipeline outcomes such as enrollment, persistence once enrolled, and completion are consistently lower for students in regions with the highest concentrations of Tier 1 communities (Tippett & Kahn, 2018e).



MANY IN [OUR] COMMUNITY NEED GUIDANCE. WITH A POPULATION NEAR THE POVERTY LINE YOU NEED TO CREATE PROGRAMS TO **GET KIDS INTERESTED IN EDUCATION. . . .**

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

25. <https://www.nccommerce.com/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers>

# III. PREPARATION FOR EDUCATION, CAREER, AND LIFE

**KEYWORDS:** *Quality Education across All Sectors; School-to-Workforce Continuum*

North Carolina’s employers do not have access to enough homegrown talent with the skills needed to help the state remain competitive. Employers’ responses to the North Carolina Department of Commerce’s 2018 Employer Needs Survey<sup>26</sup> indicate that half are not able to hire the workers they need. They cite a lack of employability skills (65%), technical skills (49%), and overall education (43%).

To address these requirements, every North Carolina student should receive rigorous academic and career preparation from well-prepared teachers and school leaders. In addition, schools must provide each student with opportunities to engage in college-level coursework and to explore multiple career pathways. Finally, while students need to be ready for each level of education, every institution—from pre-Kindergarten to postsecondary—also needs to be student-ready. In order to ensure that every student is prepared to meet the demands of our growing economy, each individual must have access to a student-centered education that optimizes her or his academic and career preparation.

The task does not end with academic preparation and acquisition of technical skills alone. Across all education sectors,<sup>27</sup> North Carolina also should help students improve social-emotional skills like self-regulation and communication, as well as transferable skills, which, in the state’s emerging economy, means developing broad skills like problem-solving and critical thinking alongside the more specific skills each employer needs.

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26. <https://www.nccommerce.com/nc-workforce-development/workforce/commission--workforce/2018employerneedssurvey.pdf>

27. Sectors refer to the major periods in an individual’s growth and development: Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade; Postsecondary (credential, 2-year, and 4-year programs), and Workforce. These sectors can—and often do—overlap (e.g., an individual can be engaged in the Postsecondary sector and also simultaneously be a member of the workforce).

## 1. RECRUIT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN EXCELLENT EDUCATORS STATEWIDE

*Improve recruitment, preparation, support, constructive evaluation, and retention of high-quality educators at all levels: childcare center and preschool teachers and leaders; K-12 teachers, teacher-leaders, and administrators; and higher education faculty and leadership.*

To ensure that all students have access to educators who can meet their unique needs, the Commission recommends focusing initial efforts on: improving compensation; increasing the pool of teachers and leaders of color; preparing high-quality teachers and leaders for childcare and preschool centers and for schools with the greatest need; enhancing educator preparation for working with students with special needs; and expanding access to evidence-based professional development that maximizes educator potential.

Next to funding, Gallup poll participants identified teacher quality and teacher turnover as the biggest challenges facing K-12 schools (Gallup, 2018). Listening Tour participants—many of whom were practicing educators—said that many people shy away from teaching as a profession because of the high expectations and low pay. For those who do enter the profession, perceptions of lack of support often contribute to early exits, as do the added responsibilities that fall to teachers in understaffed schools. At times, policies designed to reward top performers (such as differentiated teacher pay) may undermine the teacher collaboration critical to fostering growth in educator capacity within schools. (Antoszyk et al., 2018b).

One result is a relatively inexperienced teaching force, with about 16% of all North Carolina teachers having three or fewer years teaching experience. Another is a teaching force that does not reflect the racial demographics of the student population: the percentage of black students is twice as high as the percentage of black teachers, and the percentage of Hispanic students is seven times as high as the percentage of Hispanic teachers. A third is an overreliance on recruitment from out of state or from alternative pathways, both of which tend to result in less-beneficial outcomes: Only about half of our teaching force is trained in-state (public and private), but teachers prepared in-state are more effective and are more likely to remain teaching in North Carolina than are those who are prepared out-of-state or who enter the profession via alternate paths (Bastian, 2018).



## 2. ADOPT RIGOROUS, STANDARDS-ALIGNED, CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULA

*Provide guidance to help every school district adopt and use high-quality, evidence-based, NC Standard Course of Study-aligned, and culturally relevant<sup>28</sup> curricula and instructional materials.*

The state revises content standards on a regular basis, and it has increased graduation requirements many times in the past. One of the more notable changes impacting standards and graduation requirements. Starting with the students who entered high school in the 2012-13 school year (that is, students who for the most part graduated in 2016), graduation now requires completion of a college preparatory course of study aligned to UNC system requirements (Edmunds, 2018). But standards and requirements are not the same as curricula—the instructional materials selected by school systems to help students master those standards and meet those requirements. While the state provides some guidance (for instance, a statewide committee recommends textbooks that best match the standards), curriculum development remains largely a local responsibility. Listening Tour participants shared concerns that some of the curricula used in their high schools does not adequately prepare students for postsecondary work, and that curricula all along the continuum often favor narrow and specific assessments of student progress over broader and more holistic assessments (Antoszyk et al., 2018b). In addition, curricula often do not include systematic programs for or emphasis on other college readiness skills, such as communication and time management (Edmunds, 2018).

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28. Culturally relevant curricula refers to standards-based content designed to be more accessible to students from a variety of backgrounds via incorporation of relatable aspects of students' out-of-school experiences.

### 3. PRIORITIZE HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

*Ensure that every learning environment in pre-Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade has the capacity to prepare every student for transition into 4<sup>th</sup> grade and for success in the grades beyond.<sup>29</sup>*

One of the clearest messages across all of our data sources and stakeholder groups was the fundamental importance of comprehensive, high-quality early learning. Half of all Gallup poll respondents said that they believe preschool has a major impact on students’ long-term success (Gallup, 2018), and Listening Tour participants across the state contended that achievement gaps form before enrollment in Kindergarten and that overcoming those gaps is difficult (Antoszyk et al., 2018b). In addition, they shared that many students who do not attend preschool have greater difficulty adjusting not just academically but also socially and emotionally to Kindergarten (Antoszyk et al., 2018c). Research supports these impressions: Preschool programs positively impact cognitive skills, and benefits increase with program quality and persist over time. Even more importantly, gains for preschool students at risk academically are more likely to persist when they are supported by a comprehensive early learning framework that includes early elementary grades and that emphasizes program access, quality, and alignment (Muschkin, 2018).

There are many examples of early learning successes across our state, but the quality, availability, and affordability of early childhood education options varies by community (Antoszyk et al., 2018e; Gallup, 2018; EdNC, 2018), and many parents shared that researching preschool options can be challenging (Antoszyk et al., 2018c). Currently, the state-supported NC Pre-K program serves only about 50 percent of eligible low-income students annually, and that number is lower in some years based on funding (Muschkin, 2018).



I BELIEVE THAT EXPANDED PRESCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES IN EVERY PUBLIC SCHOOL WILL HELP CLOSE THE GAP FOR STUDENTS WHO CURRENTLY ENTER KINDERGARTEN WITHOUT THE NECESSARY READINESS SKILLS.

**A SUCCESSFUL EARLY START TO SCHOOL WILL GIVE CHILDREN A BETTER CHANCE AT ACHIEVING BENCHMARKS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND BEYOND.**

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

29. The Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative’s Action Framework provides guidance for this work by establishing expectations for North Carolina’s birth-through-age-eight child and family systems and recommending actions to realize those expectations (<https://buildthefoundation.org/initiative/pathways-to-grade-level-reading>)

## 4. STRENGTHEN POSTSECONDARY READINESS

*Evaluate and strengthen postsecondary readiness through targeted, regular interventions that address both academic and social-emotional preparation, beginning in middle school and extending through the postsecondary transition years (11<sup>th</sup> grade through the first year of postsecondary education).*

When asked how to improve postsecondary prospects for students, Listening Tour participants often said, “start earlier,” and the numbers bear them out. Scores on 8th grade reading and mathematics tests indicate the likelihood of eventual enrollment in a UNC system school with about the same level of accuracy as do ACT scores taken toward the end of high school (Lauen & Tomberlin, 2018). And, while the proportion of high school students whose test scores indicate that they are college- and career-ready has increased slightly over the past four years, the overall rate remains at about only 50% (Edmunds, 2018).

In addition, participants at several Listening Tour sessions emphasized the importance of including instruction in non-academic areas as well, such as in soft skills development and financial literacy. They reminded us that developing these skills in students is just as important for preparing them for postsecondary and workforce success as is the development of academic skills (Antoszyk et al., 2018d and 2018f).

## 5. ACCELERATE AND EXPAND PATHWAYS TO A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL

*Provide both first-time students and returning adult learners with more opportunities to reduce the time necessary to complete credential and degree programs (e.g., opportunities to earn college credit in high school or for work-based experiences).*

Much of myFutureNC’s work is predicated on the growing importance of postsecondary degrees and credentials in our changing economy, and most North Carolinians agree; over 80% of respondents to the Gallup survey do not believe that there are a lot of economic opportunities for individuals with



only a high school diploma (Gallup, 2018). One of the keys to meeting our ambitious attainment goal will be finding more ways for students of all ages to complete a wider variety of postsecondary options efficiently—whether they are fresh out of high school or returning to school after years in the workplace.

For example, we may need to expand initiatives like our state’s early college high schools, which provide students opportunities to earn college credit while still in high school. Studies of North Carolina’s early colleges suggest not only that they improve students’ college readiness but also that they have a large impact on postsecondary credential attainment (Edmunds, 2018)—not surprisingly so, given that they reduce the time to a degree and the cost of a degree, and given that they increase exposure to advanced curricula earlier in a student’s trajectory by providing pathways for high school students to earn college credits. Finding more ways for students at any stage in life to complete postsecondary options more efficiently also means requiring more of our colleges and universities to adapt more nimbly to our rapidly-changing occupational landscape and to create more ways to serve mid-career adults who want to re-skill in order to be better prepared for that new landscape (Walden, 2017b). Some two-year and four-year campuses have programs that help to shorten the time to a degree for adult learners—for example, by supporting adult learners who did not complete degrees but who have some credits,<sup>30</sup> or by providing credit for prior learning experiences—but the state does not yet have a fully-coordinated process for doing so (Brown-Graham & Moga Bryant, 2018).



[OUR STATE] SHOULD EXPAND . . . EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL OPTIONS TO **PROVIDE MORE STUDENTS WITH THE CHOICE TO GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR A CAREER** AND WITH AN ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE. FOR MANY STUDENTS, THE VISION OF GRADUATING AT 19 WITH SOLID CAREER OPTIONS IS MORE ATTAINABLE AND PRACTICAL.

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

30. See, for instance, the various Part-Way Home initiatives—<http://bit.ly/part-way-home-initiative>—available on several UNC System campuses to adult learners with some college credits but no degree.

## 6. EXPAND WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

*Promote and expand current educator-business community partnership efforts to expand and scale work-based learning opportunities (such as internships and apprenticeships for youth, postsecondary students, and returning adults) that support development of both industry-specific and social-emotional, cross-industry (transferable) skills.<sup>31</sup>*

Almost all of the credits required for graduation in North Carolina (22 of 26) are academic courses, leaving little room in a student's course schedule for career preparation (Bartlett & Howze, 2018). Expansion of experiential options such as work-based learning opportunities can help to fill that void. Focus group participants noted that doing so successfully will require more than just cursory involvement from employers, but that the reward potential for this involvement was high—for students and employers alike. Employer engagement with students, families, and schools through career fairs, job shadowing and site visits, mentorships, internships, and apprenticeships not only helps students prepare for careers but also helps employers promote pathways to employment about which students may have little knowledge. In addition, these experiences provide employers with opportunities to manage student expectations about life beyond the classroom well before they enter the workforce (Antoszyk et al., 2018c).



WE NEED TO . . . PROVIDE MORE APPRENTICESHIP-TYPE SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS THAT **REQUIRE SCHOOLS, GOVERNMENT, AND PRIVATE INDUSTRY TO WORK TOGETHER AND PROVIDE REAL-WORLD APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS.** [WE NEED TO] PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY TO EMBRACE THIS . . . INITIATIVE.

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

31. An example of current work in this area is the state's new Navigator tool, developed through a partnership between the Governor's Office, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, and private investors: <http://bit.ly/classrooms-and-careers>



## IV. COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

**KEYWORDS:** *Coordinated Support Services; Aspirations; Lifelong Growth*

Students of all ages and experience levels, as well as their families, need access to coordinated services that can help them actualize their aspirations and reach their full personal and professional potentials. Some students need support to attend school regularly, to succeed in foundational middle and high school courses, to catch up on needed knowledge and skills prior to high school graduation, or to navigate successfully the path toward postsecondary and labor market success. Others require greater support once they arrive at college to complete essential postsecondary tasks like course enrollment or the FAFSA, to pass credit-bearing coursework, or to graduate on time. Still others outside the education system, like disconnected youth and adult workers, may benefit from services integrated across workforce and education sectors, such as childcare support, transportation, housing assistance, and food security. This group of students in particular would benefit from greater engagement on the part of the business community in the development and promotion of these services and opportunities. Beyond specific supports such as these, equally important are cross-sector efforts to cultivate a statewide culture that values and encourages postsecondary attainment.

Without clear and aligned support systems that work together to inform students about available education and training opportunities, how to access them, and how to succeed once enrolled, too many promising students will lose opportunities to earn and realize the benefits of postsecondary credentials.

## 1. COORDINATE STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

*Connect and sustain support systems within and across schools, as well as into the business and industry sector. These systems should support not only entering preschoolers and current students but also disconnected youth and adults as they navigate the various education systems. Couple this work with an effort to elevate awareness of and community support for the goals of this coordinated support system.*

In particular, use data, school and community resources and partnerships, and evidence-based solutions to help schools and communities reduce the number of students who face barriers to full engagement in school<sup>32</sup> by directly addressing those barriers.<sup>33</sup>

During the Listening Tour, many participants talked about the importance of meeting the basic needs of students as part of a complete strategy for improving attainment across the education continuum. Students need supports to deal with academic challenges and transitions, but also with challenges like mental health issues, military deployment of a family member, death, abuse, and more. In addition, Listening Tour participants raised concerns about the lack of trained staff available to help students navigate all of these issues (Antoszyk et al., 2018d).

The number of schools across the state that find it necessary to provide support services like meals, counseling, and medical care to students in order to achieve their education goals is growing. Wraparound services in schools can help to foster a sense of community and increase attendance, but schools need additional support from community and government organizations to provide these services—especially in the forms of trained personnel and funding (Antoszyk et al., 2018d).



[OUR CHILDREN ARE] DEALING WITH THINGS AT HOME, THEY'RE DEALING WITH ISSUES. THE LEAST OF THEIR CONCERN IS, **'HOW AM I GOING TO BECOME A WELDER?'**

— LISTENING TOUR PARTICIPANT

32. For example, students who are chronically absent from school, or who have disengaged as adults

33. For example, by addressing the contribution of punitive discipline to chronic absenteeism (as well as its disproportionate allocation by race), or by reducing obstacles to potential re-entry for older learners

## 2. RAISE POSTSECONDARY ASPIRATIONS AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES

*Strengthen and align current postsecondary and career advising, awareness, and preparation strategies for students of all ages and their families (including financial literacy training) to encourage and support more students as they transition into postsecondary, whether from high school or from the workforce.*

Attainment is about more than earning a specific type of diploma from a certain kind of college—it is about earning a postsecondary degree or credential of any kind that makes it possible for the earner to meet or exceed her or his personal goals. That broader perspective about postsecondary options is the first step toward raising the aspirations of potential new and returning students who otherwise may not realize that a wider array of viable postsecondary options exists than they may have first suspected. As many Listening Tour participants noted, widening knowledge of the value of postsecondary options beyond the four-year college pathway is critical (Antoszyk et al., 2018a).

In order to choose the best path to personal attainment, each student should understand all of the options available and also should receive the guidance necessary to weigh various paths against each other. That level of understanding begins with thorough and consistent communication. Almost a quarter of the respondents to the EducationNC survey (23%) identified better information about degrees and credentials that are the most relevant for the jobs available in their communities as the most helpful way to increase educational attainment among students in their communities (EdNC, 2018), and about one-third (32%) of Gallup survey respondents cited the lack of guidance counselors as one of the biggest challenges facing K-12 schools (Gallup, 2018). Currently, while about 83% of



STUDENTS IN MY COMMUNITY ONLY CONSIDER FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY TRACKS, EVEN IF THEY CANNOT AFFORD IT OR DO NOT NEED IT FOR THEIR DESIRED CAREER PATH. **WE SHOULD BE MORE INTENTIONAL ABOUT MAKING A [COMMUNITY COLLEGE] CERTIFICATE OR DEGREE AN ACCEPTABLE, VALUED PIECE OF EDUCATION FOR GOOD JOBS.**

— EDUCATIONNC SURVEY RESPONDENT

high school students who graduate on time express an intention to enroll in a postsecondary program, about one-quarter of those expressing intent do not enroll (Tippett, 2018).

### 3. STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND GUIDANCE FOR POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUCCESS

*Evaluate and strengthen postsecondary success through targeted “navigational supports,” guided pathways (e.g., pre-defined course sequences), and innovative financial supports that encourage more students—regardless of age and past educational attainment—to complete a degree or certificate in a timely fashion.*

About one quarter (23%) of EdNC survey respondents rated “better guidance about successfully moving between education levels” as the most helpful way to increase educational attainment among students in their community (EdNC, 2018). Postsecondary students who took part in the Listening Tour helped us understand better why that might be. They said that, of all of their transitions along the continuum, they struggled most with the transition from high school to postsecondary. The challenge begins in high school, when students first wrestle with the admissions and course transfer processes. Once enrolled, they identified navigating what for many of them was an entirely new school structure—from course scheduling to classroom expectations to planning a course of study to constantly managing financial aid—as a sometimes overwhelming challenge, and one that they often had to tackle with little guidance and even less understanding of who to turn to on their new campuses for support and assistance.

Parents face similar challenges when their students make the switch from high school to postsecondary. These challenges can be particularly acute for parents of first-generation college students. As one Listening Tour student participant put it, every student and family needs at least one go-to personal connection “who knows more about the student than a test score” (Antoszyk et al., 2018c).



I THINK THE PROBLEMS MY FRIENDS ARE DEALING WITH NOW IS [THAT] MOST OF THEM ARE IN SCHOOL BUT **THEY JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY WANT TO DO**, SO THEY ARE JUST TAKING CLASSES AND SWITCHING DEGREES.

— LISTENING TOUR STUDENT PARTICIPANT

## 4. INCREASE ADULT CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND RE-ENTRY INTO THE WORKFORCE

*Improve and expand practices, policies, and programs that support continuous engagement of adults in learning opportunities that provide avenues for them to upskill.*

Many of the Priorities in this document refer to the importance of ensuring that the changes proposed impact not only students who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary for the first time but also students who may want or need to return to school from the workforce. Indeed, more than one-third of EducationNC survey respondents (39%) said that they had not yet reached their desired level of educational attainment (EdNC, 2018), and hundreds of thousands of residents have some postsecondary credentials under their belts but have not yet completed a degree or certificate (Brown-Graham & Moga Bryant, 2018; Tippett, 2017). Reaching our overall attainment goal will not be possible without acknowledging the critical importance of helping current working adults and adults who have left the workforce to obtain the skills and training they need in order to upskill for or re-enter the job market. As noted above, part of the process requires instilling a value of lifelong learning more broadly across our state, but an even larger part requires making targeted efforts to re-engage adults who could benefit from returning to school for more training.

In our current education system, many institutions lack methods not only for providing information and supports to people who are considering a return to school but also for supporting the flexibility those people may need in order to incorporate school into an already-complex life. For example, most pathways to Bachelor's degrees are characterized by full-time enrollment, but colleges may need to find more ways for their four-year pathways to accommodate some of the characteristics of pathways to marketable credentials and two-year degrees, which often include part-time enrollment and delayed completion (Tippett & Kahn, 2018d).

Listening Tour visits to workplaces across the state uncovered many examples of employees who were interested in changing careers or upskilling but who did not know how to plan a return to school or were unable to do so due to scheduling or financial constraints. Once enrolled, many of these students will need specially-tailored supports, as school re-entry after time away can be difficult (Antoszyk et al., 2018c).