

“ I would wish [The News & Observer] always to be ‘the tocsin’ and to devote itself to the policies of equality and justice to the underprivileged. If the paper should at anytime be the voice of self-interest or become the spokesman of privilege or selfishness it would be untrue to its history. — from the will of Josephus Daniels, Editor and Publisher, 1894-1948

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# Commission seeks a big boost in NC college grads

BY ANDREA SMITH

North Carolina has been hailed as the “No. 1 Best State for Business.” and “No. 2 Best Business Climate in the United States.” Our state’s economic and population growth far outpacing the national average. North Carolina has a lot to be proud of, including the enlightened vision of the private and public sector leaders who helped propel us to these leadership positions.

And yet, there is more work to be done.

Talk to employers in our state, and most will tell you there is a critical shortage of homegrown

talent with the skills needed to meet workforce demands. In our growing state, jobs are available. The problem is, we have a skills gap. In fact, a recent survey indicates that half of North Carolina employers don’t have access to the workers they need, citing a lack of technical skills and overall education.

Fewer than half of all North Carolinians ages 25-44 have earned a postsecondary degree or credential. This is particularly challenging because two out of three newly created jobs will require education beyond high school.

Too many students—particularly underserved populations—are unprepared. In fact,

80 percent of high school graduates don’t meet college readiness benchmarks. Further, of 100 9th graders who enter high school, only 34 will complete a two- or four-year degree.

As part of the state’s business community, I know there are things employers are doing to address this issue, including supporting the work being done locally across our state. But there’s more work to be done. Fortunately, we know that public/private partnerships work — and so we must derive inspiration from the leaders who came before us to power this effort.

Over the last year, it has been my pleasure to serve as co-chair of the myFutureNC Commis-

sion, comprised of leaders in education, business, philanthropy and government. myFutureNC is laser-focused on addressing this critical economic imperative.

Just this week, the myFutureNC Commission unveiled a bold state-level education goal. It’s realistic, attainable and ambitious: 2 million 25- to 44-year-old North Carolinians hold a high-quality credential or degree by 2030. Based on our current trajectory, the state is projected to have 1.6 million 25-44-year-olds with a credential or degree by 2030. Achieving our goal will require an additional 400,000 North Carolinians to further their education beyond high school.

This important endeavor will require a state-led and locally-owned effort. We must align stakeholders, encourage innovation, empower educators and support multiple pathways for student success.

By addressing these issues, we

will also be advancing another important goal of ensuring that more North Carolinians share in our state’s prosperity. The truth is, the educational attainment rate varies widely across different sectors of our population. We can work across all geographic areas and demographics to enable individuals to participate fully in education and workforce preparation opportunities.

We have a bold vision for a future North Carolina — equipped, strong and ready. There’s a lot to be done. But history has shown us that if we all unite behind a common goal, we can accomplish anything.

*Andrea Smith is Chief Administrative Officer of Bank of America and serves as co-chair of the myFutureNC Commission.*