



Leadership North Carolina Class XXIX

Case Study for Learning Teams 1 - 4 "Educational Gaps Toward Living Wage Jobs"

During his North Carolina history presentations, Dr. Karl Campbell talks about issues and events that connect to each of the five LNC focus areas: government, education, health and human services, economic development, and the environment. Each LNC program session is organized around one of these five topics, but during every session you will learn about issues, challenges, and opportunities that connect to all of them.

Read both of the assigned case studies prior to Thursday morning. During Thursday's program, members of Learning Teams 1 - 4 will be given instructions for reflection and discussion around "Educational Gaps Toward Living Wage Jobs."

Team 1

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Overview

Across the country, there is a growing need for talent within industries such as finance, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing that provide stable, living wage jobs. Many of these jobs require postsecondary education. For the individual, education beyond high school in the form of credentials or degrees provides extensive life benefits that include higher wages, better health, and a lower likelihood of requiring disability payments. Education serves as the primary pipeline to viable employment, but there are significant gaps in who is reaching higher levels of educational attainment and moving into

living wage jobs. Populations most likely to be left behind include low-income, rural, people of color, and first-generation college-going students.¹

Evolving Job Market Toward “Good Jobs”

Due to the increase of technology, jobs have evolved and changed over the years. More traditional “blue collar” occupations now require some postsecondary education.² “Across the nation, good jobs have shifted toward associate’s degree holders and away from workers with a high school diploma or less.”³ Between 2010 and 2016, the U.S. economy added 11.5 million jobs, with 99% of those jobs going to individuals with at least some college education.⁴

- The data shows that by 2025, 60% of Americans will need some type of high-quality credential beyond high school.⁵
- According to Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, a “good job” is earning a minimum of \$35,000 (\$17 per hour for a full-time job) for those under 45.⁶
- North Carolina’s employers say they are challenged to find enough workers with the skills they need for their experienced positions that provide higher pay. Based on the North Carolina Department of Commerce’s 2020 Employer Needs Survey, employers cited a lack of employability qualities (67%), technical skills (66%), and education credentials (64%) for the jobs they are unable to fill.⁷

Postsecondary Attainment Needs

For North Carolina to be economically competitive and meet the present and future workforce needs, more individuals need education beyond high school, commonly referred to as postsecondary attainment. The Lumina Foundation defines postsecondary attainment as credentials or degrees beyond high school with clear and transparent learning outcomes leading to further education and employment.⁸ North Carolina’s postsecondary attainment rate is 51% (44% associate degree and higher and 7% short-term credentials), indicating that more than 48% of adults did not receive any credentials or degrees beyond high school.⁹

The high school graduation rate in North Carolina was at an all-time high of 86.5% in 2017; however, a large percentage of high school graduates do not begin or complete postsecondary education. Postsecondary enrollment is the precursor to attainment and according to myFutureNC, only 41% of people 18-24 are currently enrolled in college or graduate school.¹⁰

¹ Oreopoulos, Philip and Uros Petronijevic. “Making College Worth It: A Review of the Returns to Higher Education.” *The Future of Children*, Volume 23, Number 1, Spring 2013, pp. 41-65.

² National Governors Association. (2018). *Aligning State Systems for a Talent Driven Economy: A Roadmap for States*. <https://www.nga.org/center/publications/aligning-state-systems-for-a-talent-driven-economy-a-road-map-for-states/>

³ Carnevale, Anthony P., et al. (2016). *America’s Divided Recovery*. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Americas-Divided-Recovery-web.pdf>

⁴ Carnevale, A. (2016)

⁵ Lumina Education Foundation (2020). *A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent*. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#state/NC>

⁶ Carnevale, A. (2016).

⁷ NC Works Commission. (2020). *2020 Employer Needs Survey*. https://files.nc.gov/nccommerce/documents/files/2020-Employer-Needs-Survey_Final.pdf

⁸ Lumina. (2020).

⁹ Tippett, R. (2018). *Attainment Goals Attainment Gaps*. Presentation to myFutureNC, February 13, 2018.

¹⁰ myFutureNC. (2021). *Dashboard: Postsecondary Enrollment Rates*. <https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/postsecondary-completion/postsecondary-enrollment-rate/>

To understand the full scope and interconnectivity of the education pipeline, the data leading up to high school also needs consideration.

- The level of academic achievement [by] eighth grade has a more considerable impact on [student] college and career readiness than anything that happens academically in high school.¹¹
 - Less than 50% of 8th graders are college and career ready based on end-of-grade tests.
 - Less than 30% of economically disadvantaged students meet that target.
- Students who met more benchmarks on the ACT were more likely to enroll in a postsecondary program after graduation.
 - Nearly half of all N.C. high school graduates (49%) met no college-readiness benchmarks on the ACT.
 - Statewide, only 15% of graduates met all four college-readiness benchmarks.¹²
- There are large gaps in College and Career readiness indicators between different demographics: Approximately 63% of White students performed at the state's College and Career Readiness level compared to 30% of Black students and 39% of Hispanic students.

North Carolina's Education Goal

myFutureNC (MFNC) was created in 2017 to address the challenges of the education to workforce pipeline. This effort brought together a cross-sector group of leaders and stakeholders from across the state with the shared belief that “educational attainment is the key to the short-term recovery and long-term resiliency of North Carolina’s economy.”¹³ In 2019, the MFNC Commission set an education goal of *2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25-44 to hold a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree by 2030*. This goal was codified into law on June 26, 2019 ([HB664/SL 2019-55](#)).

According to MFNC, estimates project that the state will fall short of the 2030 goal by 300,000 individuals. The current pandemic is exacerbating educational barriers, especially for underserved and underrepresented populations. As a result of COVID-19, FAFSA completions and postsecondary applications and enrollment have declined year-over-year with indications that too many high school graduates face a risk of not completing higher education.¹⁴ As a comparison, after the Great Recession in 2011, “North Carolinians ages 25-44 without any college education were 3.5x more likely to be unemployed than those with college degrees.”¹⁵

¹¹ Tippett, R. (2018).

¹² ACT. (2019). The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2019: North Carolina Key Findings. <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr-2019/North-Carolina-CCCR-2019.pdf>

¹³ myFutureNC. (2020). Executive Summary: A Year in Review 2019-2020. <https://www.myfuturenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Executive-Summary-myFutureNC-Progress-Report-to-the-JLEOC-9.1.2020.pdf>

¹⁴ myFutureNC. (2021). The State of North Carolina's Talent Pipeline: Educational Attainment Report, September 1, 2021. https://www.myfuturenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/MyFutureNC_Educational-Attainment-Report-2021-Executive-Summary-8.20.2021.pdf

¹⁵ myFutureNC. (2020).