

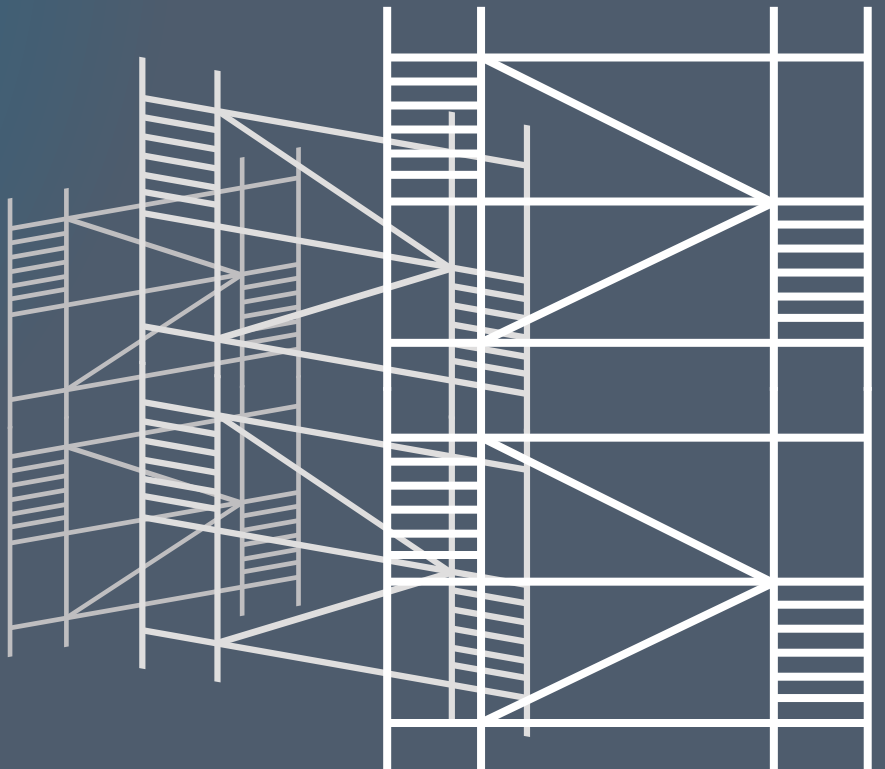



NORTH CAROLINA'S

# *Economic Imperative*

Building an  
Infrastructure of Opportunity

A REPORT FOR THE  
JOHN M. BELK ENDOWMENT





*Stalled upward economic mobility is persistent across North Carolina, not only in pockets of rural poverty but in the most dynamic urban areas. The imperative is clear: we need to build an infrastructure of opportunity to ensure all our citizens have a clear path to family-supporting work, that employers have the workforce they need to grow and innovate, and that our civic culture is one that supports prosperity for all.*

## ABOUT THE JOHN M. BELK ENDOWMENT

The John M. Belk Endowment is a private family foundation committed to creating a stronger North Carolina by improving access to postsecondary education for all students, increasing the number of students who complete postsecondary degrees and credentials, and ensuring that graduates can secure lifelong, family-sustaining employment. Founded in 1995 by John M. Belk and headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, the Endowment funds and partners with organizations that are leading the way for systemic change to better align education with workforce needs in a global economy through collaboration with educators, policymakers, employers and communities. For more information, please visit [www.jmbendowment.org](http://www.jmbendowment.org).



**John M Belk  
Endowment**  
ELEVATE THROUGH EDUCATION

## ABOUT MDC

MDC, a nonprofit based in Durham, N.C., brings together foundations, nonprofits, and leaders from government, business and the grassroots to build equity in the South through courageous conversations and systemic community solutions. Its approach—well-honed over nearly 50 years—uses research, consensus-building, and programs that bring together education, employment, and economic security. That work helps communities create an “Infrastructure of Opportunity”—the aligned systems and supports that can boost everyone, particularly those who’ve been left behind, to higher rungs on the economic ladder and contribute to local prosperity. For 20 years, MDC has published *State of the South* reports to further its mission of helping communities, organizations, and leaders close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. Learn more at [www.mdcinc.org](http://www.mdcinc.org).



**MDC**

The John M. Belk Endowment and MDC would like to thank those who served on the Advisory Panel for this report. Your participation in discussing the issues was critical to helping us understand the challenge of economic mobility in North Carolina and in your communities. Having multiple points of view from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors gave us insights into the complexity of the issues across the state and a better perspective on the promising efforts now underway.

We also would like to thank the more than 100 community leaders we interviewed across the state to develop the community profiles included in this report (see Appendix B for a full list). Their insight allowed us to build a picture of what’s happening in their diverse regions. Without their help, this report would not be as rich as it is.

In the most recent *State of the South* report, MDC called attention to “the distressing fact that it is harder in the South than anywhere else in the nation for someone born at the bottom of the income ladder to make it higher up the ladder as an adult.” This report was motivated by a desire to better understand the implications of those alarming trends in North Carolina, but throughout this process we have also been inspired by the state’s incredible resources and people who already are working to improve access to opportunity. We are fortunate in North Carolina to have a remarkable infrastructure of institutions—from our local school systems and workforce development groups, to our 58 community colleges, to the 16 campuses of the University of North Carolina system, as well as private colleges and universities—that are all dedicated to improving the lives of our people and the economies of the state, its regions, and our communities. It has taken many years to get to where we are, and in order to prepare for the new economy, we must connect the dots between systems, institutions, and people to build a true infrastructure of opportunity.

We hope this report encourages dialogue and action among leaders across the state, helping them see the challenges and work together to improve our economy and all of our citizens’ ability to move up the economic ladder.

Kristy Teskey  
Executive Director,  
John M. Belk Endowment

David Dodson  
President,  
MDC

## *The Advisory Panel*

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# North Carolina's Economic Imperative: Building an Infrastructure of Opportunity

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**N**orth Carolina prides itself on being a beacon: from creating the nation's first public university and one of its earliest community college systems, to pioneering the concept of research parks that bridge education and industry, to honing a civic culture that stressed foresight and moderation during flashpoints in Southern history, our state has been, at its best, a place that has invested for the future to build platforms of opportunity for wide numbers of residents to thrive. Yet, far too many people in our state are struggling to make ends meet. Even in our most economically dynamic places, people who grow up in low-income families are more likely to stay there as adults than almost anywhere else in the nation, and only small numbers make it to the middle- or upper-income levels despite thriving labor markets that seem full of opportunity. These issues should not just be seen as a challenge facing those who do not have access to economic opportunity. If North Carolina's business and industry is to thrive, it is imperative that our citizenry have the skills and training necessary for them to thrive, too.

In this report, we examined patterns of economic mobility and educational progress in North Carolina by demography and geography to determine who is being successfully prepared for entry and success in the most economically rewarding sectors of the state's economy. Our analysis focuses on the education-to-career continuum, a critical piece of an infrastructure of opportunity—the myriad systems that must be improved and aligned to prepare ever larger numbers of North Carolinians for family-supporting work and a better shot at sustained economic wellbeing. We paired that analysis with a close look at eight localities across the state and sketch out a series of actions that communities are taking to strengthen and align these critical systems.

### *Statewide Mobility Patterns*

These mobility patterns, paired with the rapidly changing demographics of the workforce, have significant implications for North Carolina. Our state is becoming more diverse and younger: while 81 percent of North Carolinians over the age of 75 are white, only 57 percent of those between 15 and 24 are white. The state's Latino population is quickly growing, especially in younger age groups: 69 percent of Latino residents are younger than 50, while only 50 percent of the white population is. However, educational attainment rates among these populations do not match population growth. Governor Pat McCrory's postsecondary goal is to ensure that by 2025, 67 percent of North Carolinians will have education and training beyond high school. In order to meet this goal and the competitive demands of a 21st century economy with a skilled workforce, we need to reduce disparate outcomes in education

along racial and ethnic lines. All of our young people must be seen as assets for the state's future economic prosperity and are well-trained for work in North Carolina so that work doesn't move outside of the state.

### *Building an Infrastructure of Opportunity*

The causes of economic immobility do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of systems that can both ease and impede individuals' access to opportunities. Improved access can often give them more control over economic outcomes for their families and, in many cases, break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The education-to-career continuum is a linkage of several systems within an infrastructure of opportunity like secondary and postsecondary schools, local workforce agencies, and industry. Many communities are already working toward better alignment. A strong education-to-career continuum connects more people to the necessary postsecondary credentials and family-supporting employment needed for individuals, their communities and the state to thrive.

If North Carolina is to strengthen this education-to-career continuum it first needs to identify the barriers that impede progress toward family-supporting work, the structures and interventions that encourage full participation in the community's economy, and the environmental forces that contribute to and work against postsecondary and economic success. Since this progress has to happen for individuals where they are—in our rural towns and our metropolitan centers—we profiled eight communities across the state, looking for evidence of vision and practices that generate forward motion for individuals and communities. We saw efforts that were inspiring in both aspiration and implementation; there are examples of both progress and opportunity for more deliberate action. The eight communities profiled are: Guilford County; Wilkes County; Fayetteville; Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren counties; Monroe; Wilmington; Jackson, Macon, and Swain and the Qualla Boundary; and Pitt County. Within these communities, we saw everything from a rural, four-county region with an intertwined history and economy but limited access to family-supporting work with career potential, to a city in one of North Carolina's fastest growing counties with a diverse manufacturing sector and a growing Hispanic population—and just about everything in-between.

### *Taking Action: Priorities and First Steps*

A strong infrastructure of opportunity is beyond the reach of any single institution to create: discrete pockets of excellence are insufficient for changing the trajectory of broad opportunity and improving education and employment outcomes at scale. To move from discrete programming to an aligned infrastructure of opportunity requires adoption of a guiding framework for communities to assess and create an action plan that is grounded in a common vision of economic productivity and advancement

for the community and its people; design and implementation of research-based policies and programs that can be scaled for an entire population, hold high expectations for educators, employers, and the workforce, and maintain momentum through continuous improvement; and commitment to providing adequate resources that support the common vision. The data and community anecdotes in this report support eight action steps for communities across the state:

**1** *Use local data to understand history, analyze current educational and economic outcomes, and identify gaps in the education-to-career continuum.* Good planning requires good data. Communities should begin by disaggregating data, identifying outcome disparities across race, gender, family status, and wealth, and uncover root causes.

**2** *Commit to a common vision for creating pathways to family-supporting work that allow more individuals to build wealth and thrive in the community.* This integrating vision should focus on the intersection of economic competitiveness and equity to create wealth in a way that lifts people up, particularly those stuck—generation-to-generation—at the lower-end of the income distribution.

**3** *Seek out opportunities to participate in and learn from national, regional, or state-level initiatives and learning communities.* There are communities across the region and within the state—including some of those included in this report—that are models of success, suggesting helpful policies and practices communities can adopt and identifying pitfalls they may encounter.

**4** *Embrace planning and implementation practices that engage each part of the system: from individuals to institutions.* Good planning requires attention to and engagement of the whole system; that means every level of the education system, small and large employers, and all municipal governments. Whole system engagement requires deliberate inclusion of historically marginalized communities. The places and people in the most extreme distress reveal system failures most clearly.

**5** *Encourage large institutions and employers to take the lead in innovation and cooperation.* To support a strong education-to-career continuum that aligns with workforce needs, both higher education institutions and employers must be nimble, responsive to local needs, and have the ability to shift focus as economic opportunity shifts.

**6** *Cultivate investment and assume potential in the emergent workforce.* Communities with strong institutions and systems are ones where leaders act on a belief that talent is everywhere in their community and invest in people to develop and unleash that talent.

**7** *Free up resources to address gaps in the education-to-career continuum.* In environments of scarcity, communities and institutions must have the courage to allocate resources to reflect the challenges identified on the education-to-career continuum. Too often, resources are siloed and spent based on historical habits, not aligned to a vision of the future.

**8** *Seek out local capital to create capacity for collaboration.* Risk-taking and innovation require foundational investment. Philanthropy can be catalytic, testing new ideas, building new institutions, and lowering the cost of social innovation by subsidizing risk. Local philanthropy can take the lead to leverage additional local, state, and federal investment. ■

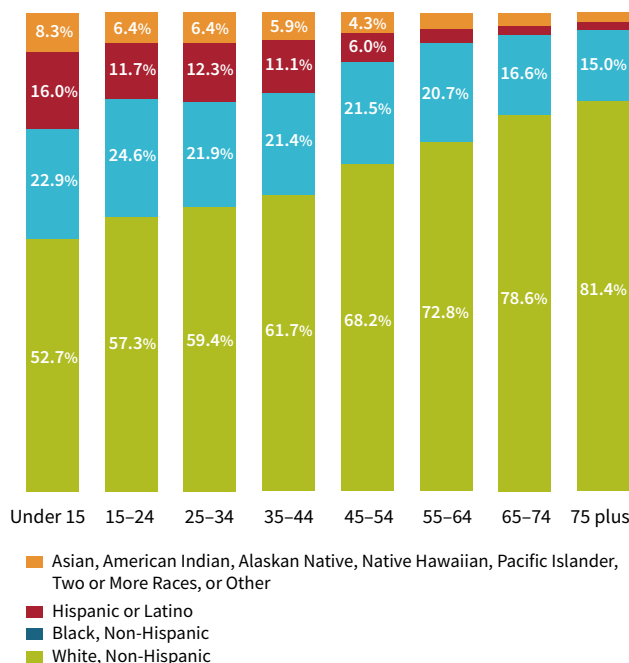
# AN ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE

North Carolina prides itself on being a beacon: From creating the nation's first public university and one of its earliest community college systems, to pioneering the concept of research parks that bridge education and industry, to honing a civic culture that stressed foresight and moderation during flashpoints in Southern history, our state has been, at its best, a place that has invested for the future to build platforms of opportunity for wide numbers of residents to thrive. People have voted with their feet: North Carolina today is the nation's ninth most populous state and an economic leader in banking, manufacturing, and agriculture.

Yet underneath the story of progress runs a more concerning narrative. In many regions of our state, it is difficult for people to connect to stable employment, especially for those without a postsecondary education or training. Far too many North Carolinians are unable to ride the tide of general prosperity to improve their economic standing. Stalled or foreshortened upward economic mobility, especially for those who start at the lower ends of the income distribution, is nagging and persistent across the state, not only in pockets of rural poverty, but in the most dynamic urban areas that drive our state's economy. In our most economically dynamic places like Charlotte and the Triangle, people who grow up in low-income families are more likely to stay there as adults than almost anywhere else in the nation, and only small numbers make it to the middle- or upper-income levels. Despite thriving labor markets that seem full of opportunity, too few youth and young adults who grow up in low-income families, particularly youth of color, are getting these good jobs, and too few have the academic and workplace skills to compete. Many adults and dislocated workers struggle to find their way through institutions and organizations that are working to support education, training, and employment connections, but which are not always aligned or well-resourced. The education-to-career pathways that should prepare and connect North Carolinians to economically meaningful employment are not yet vigorous or coherent enough to help all the state's people connect to work with a career future.

Yet these issues should not just be seen as a challenge facing those who do not have access to economic opportunity. If North Carolina's business and industry is to thrive, it is imperative that our entire workforce is trained and skilled. North Carolina, like the rest of the nation, needs to understand the implications of the rapidly changing demographics of its workforce. Our state is becoming more diverse and younger. While 81 percent of North Carolinians over the age of 75 are white, only 57 percent of those between 15 and 24 are white. The state's Latino population is quickly growing, especially in younger age groups: 69 percent of Latino residents are younger than 50, while only 50 percent of the white population is. In order to meet the competitive demands of a 21st century economy with a skilled workforce, we will need to reduce disparate outcomes in education along racial and ethnic lines. All of our young people must be seen as assets for the state's future economic prosperity.

**Fig. 1** Changing Demographics of North Carolina  
*Age Groups by Race and Ethnicity*



Source: Economic Modeling Specialist, Inc. — 2014.3 Class of Worker; data accessed February 4, 2015.

Pockets of programmatic excellence and innovation proliferate in North Carolina's education and workforce preparation landscape. But viewed through the lens of upward economic mobility, the state is not yet performing the essential task of positioning all of North Carolina's people to enter and advance in the workplace, provide the talent our economy requires, and ultimately improve their economic status. And as important as good public policy and effective programs are, they must be implemented through systems and institutions—systems and institutions that often are not designed to promote mobility for those at the bottom. Genuinely different mobility *outcomes* can only be the result of genuinely different *systems*. Policy can provide direction and incentives for systems change, and innovative programs can populate those systems and show in miniature what a new system can produce, but changed outcomes at scale require changed systems. And this work requires a recognition that the outcomes the state wants will take time—systems change doesn't happen overnight.

This report examines patterns of economic mobility and educational progress in North Carolina by demography and geography to determine who is being successfully prepared for entry and success in the most economically rewarding sectors of the

state's economy. This analysis is followed by a look at the education-to-career continuum, the critical piece of an infrastructure of opportunity—the myriad systems that must be improved and aligned to prepare ever larger numbers of North Carolinians for family-supporting work and a better shot at sustained economic wellbeing. It then profiles eight communities representative of the economic diversity of the state to see what local leaders are doing to build an infrastructure of opportunity. These data and community anecdotes support three key areas for action in communities across the state:

1. Adoption of a guiding framework for analysis and action that is grounded in a common vision of economic productivity and advancement for the community and its people.

2. Design and implementation of research-based policies and programs that can be scaled for an entire population, hold high expectations for educators, employers, and the workforce, and maintain momentum through continuous improvement.
3. Commitment to providing adequate resources that support the common vision.

The state faces formidable challenges to spur economic mobility in North Carolina; there are many promising efforts on which we can build, and much unfinished business required to make the infrastructure of opportunity a powerful and pervasive presence from Cullowhee to Wilmington. We hope the story we tell here will inspire dialogue and action among leaders who want North Carolina to remain a bright beacon of promise and opportunity for all of its people. ■

## MOBILITY IN NORTH CAROLINA

*In North Carolina, far too many people are struggling to make ends meet. When so many people are unable to find consistent work that pays reasonably well, the whole economy suffers: people cannot build savings and wealth through critical investments like home ownership. They cannot afford to go back to school and learn skills for a new career in an emerging industry. They cannot save up to take a risk and start a business. And, critically, they cannot invest in educational and extracurricular enrichment for their children or save for their postsecondary education.*

### NORTH CAROLINA MOBILITY IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

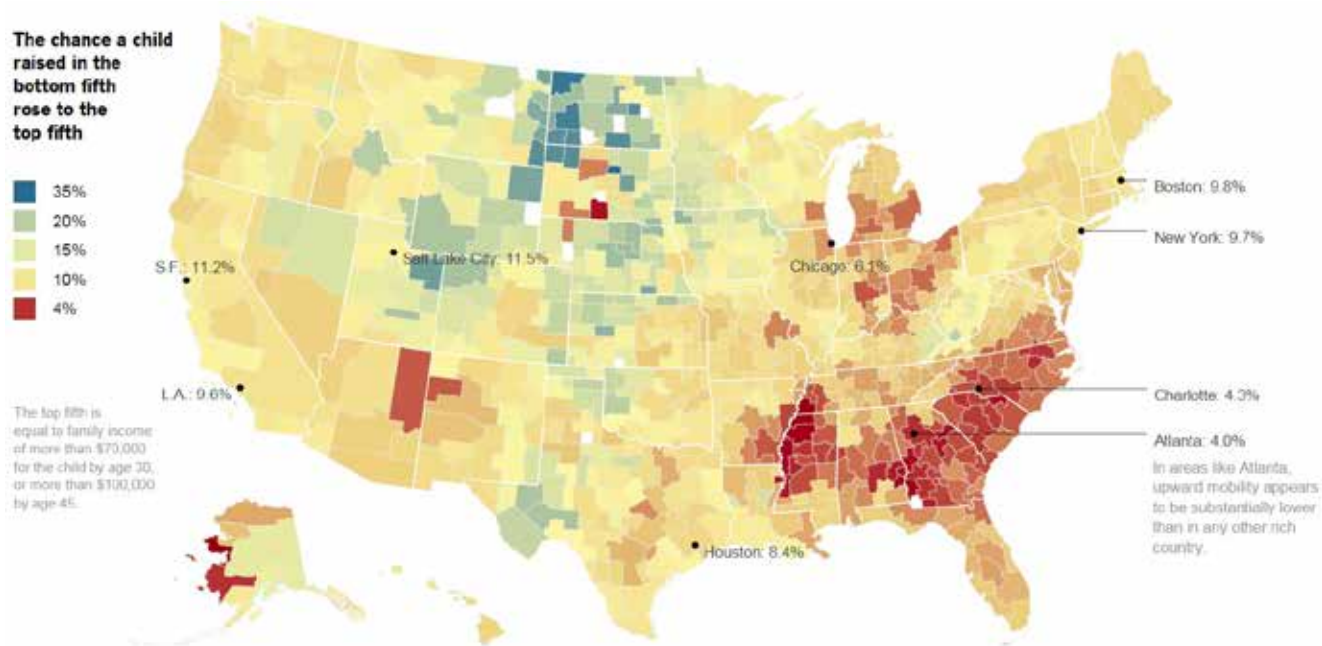
**W**e begin by looking at overall mobility patterns in the state. We then look at North Carolina's largest municipalities to show where the state ranks nationally for economic mobility, and finally examine data on factors associated with mobility, including educational attainment and racial disparities.

#### *Statewide Mobility Patterns*

While upward economic mobility is limited in the U.S. as a whole, North Carolina stands out in a series of studies from the Equality of Opportunity Project.<sup>1</sup> For young people who were raised in families in the lowest quintile of the income distribution, few end up in the middle or highest quintiles as adults.<sup>2</sup> The map on page 8 shows movement from the lowest to the highest quintile for all U.S. commuting zones. (Equality of Opportunity Project researchers use commuting zones, regional economies with an interconnected labor market, in their analyses.)

## Lack of Mobility: The South Stands Out

Source: 2013 New York Times map of Equality of Opportunity Project Data



While there is significant variation in mobility levels across North Carolina, no part of the state meets the national average. Generally, mobility levels are lowest in the eastern and Piedmont regions of the state; they are closer to the average in some western areas. Looking at movement from the lowest to the highest quintile for each of the state's commuting zones, all but two areas are ranked in the bottom quarter of places in the U.S. In a perfectly mobile society—where parental income is not correlated with adult child

income—we would expect to see adult children evenly distributed across the quintiles. Instead, we see between 3 and 8 percent of children born in the lowest income quintile rise to the top quintile. When we look at movement from the lowest quintile to the middle and upper middle quintile, we see between 25 and 33 percent, rather than the 40 percent we would see in a perfectly mobile society.

### INCOME IN NORTH CAROLINA

In 2014, North Carolina's household income quintiles were as follows, meaning 20 percent of households fell into each of these categories:

**Lowest quintile: \$19,916 or less**

**Lower middle quintile: \$19,917 to \$36,751**

**Middle quintile: \$36,752 to \$58,159**

**Upper middle quintile: \$58,160 to \$93,418**

**Highest quintile: \$93,419 or more**

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) project, which calculates the minimum annual income a household needs to cover basic expenses like food, child care, healthcare, housing, and transportation, the minimum annual income for one adult is \$21,907, which is well above the poverty line and the current minimum wage. That means more than a full fifth of households in North Carolina fall below the income level needed to get by—and that's without accounting for the additional cost of raising children. Households in the lowest 40 percent of the income distribution are only making enough to get by if they do not have children.<sup>3</sup>

Here is the hourly family-supporting wage and the equivalent annual income in North Carolina by family size and composition:

**Fig. 2** Mobility in North Carolina Commuting Zones

*What are the chances a child raised in the lowest fifth of the income distribution will rise to the top fifth as an adult in each North Carolina commuting zone? To the middle- and upper-middle fifth?*

Commuting Zone Name	Rank of 729 Zones for Chance of Rising from Lowest to Highest (#1 is worst mobility)	Chance of Rising from Parent Q1 to Child Q5 (From lowest to highest)	Chance of Rising from Parent Q1 to Child Q3 plus Q4 (From lowest to middle or upper middle)
Wilson	13	3.2%	24.8%
Roanoke Rapids	18	3.3%	25.2%
Henderson	23	3.4%	24.6%
Fayetteville	36	3.8%	25.9%
Wilmington	47	4.2%	25.9%
Spartanburg (SC)	50	4.3%	28.1%
Charlotte	53	4.4%	26.0%
Winston-Salem	58	4.5%	26.0%
Hickory	60	4.5%	27.8%
Goldsboro	62	4.5%	28.6%
Jacksonville	66	4.7%	27.7%
Greensboro	69	4.7%	26.0%
Washington	84	5.0%	28.4%
Raleigh	85	5.0%	26.7%
Gastonia	95	5.2%	26.4%
North Wilkesboro	96	5.2%	30.9%
Virginia Beach (VA)	108	5.4%	26.9%
Morganton	114	5.4%	29.8%
Boone	119	5.6%	34.7%
Franklin	124	5.7%	30.8%
Sylva	145	6.1%	34.5%
Asheville	159	6.3%	30.6%
Galax (VA)	282	8.0%	31.8%
Andrews	290	8.0%	33.0%

Source: Equality of Opportunity Project

*A child born in Wilson to a family in the lowest income quintile has a 1 in 4 chance of rising to the middle or upper middle income quintiles and only a 3 percent chance of rising to the highest quintile. That means nearly three-fourths of children in Wilson born in the lowest income quintile stay in that quintile or move up only one quintile.*

## North Carolina's Family-Supporting Wage

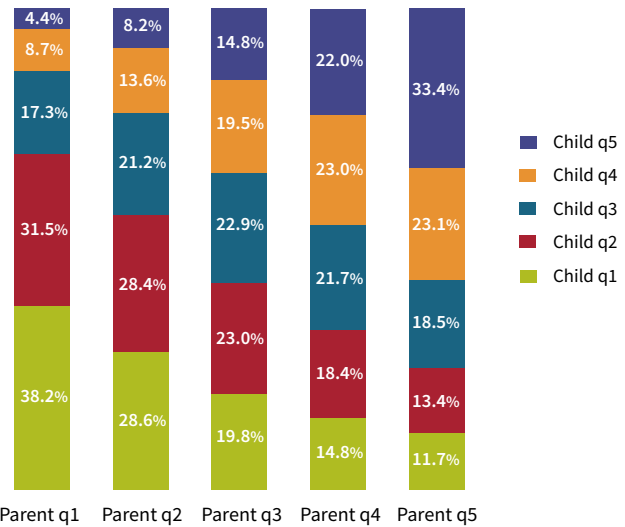
	Required Annual Income Before Taxes	Hourly Family-Supporting Wage
1 Adult	\$21,907	\$10.53
1 Adult 1 Child	\$44,995	\$21.63
1 Adult 2 Children	\$53,727	\$25.83
1 Adult 3 Children	\$67,262	\$32.34
2 Adults (One Working)	\$35,126	\$16.89
2 Adults (One Working) 1 Child	\$42,556	\$20.46
2 Adults (One Working) 2 Children	\$48,019	\$23.09
2 Adults (One Working) 3 Children	\$52,727	\$25.35
2 Adults	\$35,126	\$8.44
2 Adults 1 Child	\$49,575	\$11.92
2 Adults 2 Children	\$59,417	\$14.28
2 Adults 3 Children	\$68,505	\$16.47

- The above economic mobility numbers may not seem surprising at first glance, given that some children who grow up in low-income households are still making it to the top, but when we examine patterns of movement among all quintiles, we see how dramatically these adult children's incomes are linked with those of their parents. For young people born in the lowest quintile of the income distribution in Charlotte (Figure 3), for example, 38 percent will stay there as adults, another 31 percent will only move up one quintile, and just 4 percent will make it to the highest quintile.



Fig. 3 Economic Mobility: An Urban Challenge...

What are the chances a child in raised in Charlotte in a given quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

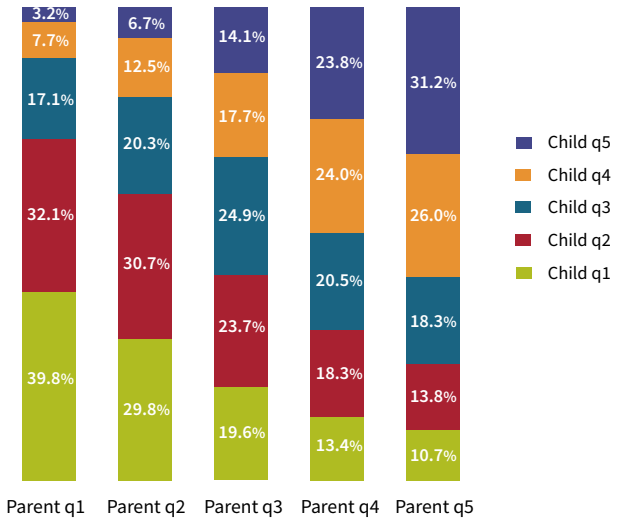


Source: Equality of Opportunity Project

For young people born in the lowest quintile of the income distribution in Wilson (Figure 4), 40 percent will stay there as adults, another 32 percent will only move up one quintile, and only 3 percent will make it to the highest quintile.

Fig. 4 ...And a Rural Challenge

What are the chances a child in raised in Wilson in a given quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?



Source: Equality of Opportunity Project

Again, in a society where parental income is not correlated with adult child income, children would be equally distributed across the quintiles as adults (20 percent in each), regardless of where they started. In our society, we see a disproportionate number of people stay at the lower end—and at the higher end—of the income distribution. Children growing up in low-income families in North Carolina are likely to stay there, in rural or urban areas, just as children growing up in high-income families are likely to stay there.

Fig. 5 Stalled Mobility in North Carolina

What are the chances a child raised in the lowest fifth of the income distribution will stay there as an adult in each North Carolina commuting zone? And the chances a child raised in the highest fifth of the income distribution will stay there as an adult?

Commuting Zone Name	Chance of Staying From Parent Q1 to Child Q1	Chance of Staying From Parent Q5 to Child Q5
Henderson	42.6%	30.6%
Gastonia	41.0%	33.8%
Winston-Salem	40.6%	32.9%
Wilmington	40.4%	29.2%
Hickory	40.2%	32.6%
Wilson	39.8%	31.2%
Morganton	39.5%	30.2%
Roanoke Rapids	39.5%	35.9%
Greensboro	39.5%	32.1%
Fayetteville	39.3%	28.1%
Raleigh	38.5%	32.9%
Charlotte	38.2%	33.4%
North Wilkesboro	38.1%	33.8%
Virginia Beach	37.5%	33.7%
Jacksonville	37.4%	31.5%
Washington	37.2%	32.5%
Goldsboro	36.8%	35.2%
Asheville	36.5%	29.8%
Galax	36.5%	37.1%
Spartanburg	35.9%	33.5%
Franklin	34.0%	30.7%
Andrews	33.4%	26.6%
Boone	33.0%	25.7%
Sylva	32.8%	27.2%

Source: Equality of Opportunity Project

Note: Commuting zones are named for the largest place in each zone, and some include multiple cities. For example, the Raleigh commuting zone includes Durham and Chapel Hill. Several commuting zones cross state borders.

### Rankings of North Carolina's Largest Municipalities

Another way to look at intergenerational mobility is to compare the incomes of adult children who grew up in families with the same incomes but in different places. Low-income youth in some areas of the state have better prospects for careers and economic security than in others. In the following chart, the 100 largest U.S. commuting zones are shown ranked by the percentage gain or loss in income for an adult child from a low-income family, compared to the national average. All four North Carolina commuting zones rank in the bottom ten. One way to think of this is that there is a greater “penalty” for people who grew up in low-income families in some places than in others. At 95th, people from low-income families in Raleigh earn an estimated 13 percent less as adults than those born in a place with average mobility.

**Fig. 6 Gain or Loss in Adult Income by Commuting Zone**

*Percentage gain (or loss) in adult income from growing up in each of the 100 largest Commuting Zone's in the U.S. for children in low-income families (25th percentile), Bottom 10 and Top 10 Only*

Rank	Commuting Zone	State	All Kids
100	Fayetteville	North Carolina	-17.8%
99	New Orleans	Louisiana	-14.8%
98	Greensboro	North Carolina	-14.8%
97	Charlotte	North Carolina	-14.4%
96	Columbia	South Carolina	-13.9%
95	Raleigh	North Carolina	-12.6%
94	Greenville	South Carolina	-12.2%
93	Memphis	Tennessee	-11.6%
92	Orlando	Florida	-11.4%
91	Fresno	California	-11.1%
10	Portland	Oregon	5.2%
9	Spokane	Washington	5.6%
8	Washington DC	District Of Columbia	5.8%
7	Omaha	Nebraska	6.4%
6	Des Moines	Iowa	6.6%
5	Madison	Wisconsin	7.4%
4	Reading	Pennsylvania	9.1%
3	Salt Lake City	Utah	9.2%
2	Minneapolis	Minnesota	9.7%
1	Seattle	Washington	11.6%

Source: Equality of Opportunity Project

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MOBILITY

While existing research does not always tell us why some places have higher levels of mobility, the Equality of Opportunity Project studies provide information on correlated factors.

### Inequality

Places with high levels of income inequality are more likely to have low levels of mobility.<sup>4</sup> Based on U.S. Census Bureau data, North Carolina had the 16th highest level of inequality among the states in 2014. As inequality rises, the income quintiles are getting farther apart, like rungs on a ladder.

Postwar economic growth in the U.S. was widely shared across all economic classes, with every quintile making real income gains for several decades. Over the last few decades, income gains have not been universal. From 1947 to 1979, households in all five quintiles experienced income growth, but from 1979 to 2010, the top fifth grew, the middle fifths barely grew, and incomes in the bottom fifth declined.<sup>5</sup> Full-time workers in North Carolina at the 10th percentile of the income distribution saw a 3.1 percent decrease in their real annual earned income between 1980 and 2012; income for workers at the 50th percentile increased 13.8 percent, and income for workers at the 90th percentile increased by 29.4 percent.<sup>6</sup>

If all income quintiles were seeing an increase in their incomes, the implications of low economic mobility might be less concerning, but the people in the lowest quintiles of the income distribution are experiencing stagnant or negative growth in their real incomes. This is occurring while the cost of healthcare and education are dramatically rising.<sup>7</sup> In this context, limited economic mobility means that low-income people are unlikely to be able to access opportunity. While perfect mobility may be impossible, such low levels are dangerous for civic cohesion and economic growth.

### School Poverty and School Segregation

Places with high levels of mobility are more likely to have consistently high-quality K-12 schools.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, in many places, educational quality varies widely between schools and between districts, and residential segregation and school funding formulas often concentrate students from low-wealth families in lower quality schools. Because residential segregation is often tied to race and ethnicity—an average middle-income black family lives in a lower-income neighborhood than an average low-income white family—students of color are more likely to end up in high-poverty schools. An Urban Institute and Southern Education Foundation study examined the concentration of poverty in schools and found that a student from a low-income family is six times as likely as one from a high-income family to attend a high-poverty school, one where more than 75 percent of students are from low-income families.<sup>9</sup> The study also found that students of color are far more likely to attend high-poverty schools: while only 8 percent of white students attend high-poverty schools, 45 percent of black students do. In Durham County, N.C., where 61 percent of public school students are from low-income families, 36 percent of black students attend high-poverty schools, while only 6 percent of white students



do. The chart below (Figure 7) shows the percentage of students from low-income and not-low-income families, and the percentage of black and white students, who attend high-poverty schools in North Carolina’s 10 largest counties.

While the South’s public schools were less segregated than the rest of the nation during the 1980s and early 1990s, by 2009 Southern levels of school segregation rose quickly enough to catch up to the national average:

- In 1968, 81 percent of black students in the South attended schools with a majority of students of color, compared to 77 percent nationally.
- By 1980, only 57 percent of black students in the South and 63 percent of black students nationally attended schools where students of color were the majority.
- In 2009, that level had risen to 74 percent in the South and the nation, with a third of black students in the South attending schools with more than 90 percent students of color.

- Latino students are also likely to attend schools with a majority of students of color: 79 percent of Latino students in the South and the U.S. attend schools where students of color are the majority, and 41 percent attend schools where more than 90 percent of students are students of color.<sup>10</sup> In North Carolina, where black students comprised 26 percent of the public school population in 2011, 72 percent of those black students attended schools where students of color were the majority, and one in five attended a school where students of color made up at least 90 percent of the population. Latino students made up 13 percent of public school enrollment in 2011; 58 percent of those Latino students attended schools where students of color were the majority, and 13 percent attended a school where students of color made up at least 90 percent of the population. The typical white student in North Carolina attends a school where 66 percent of students are white, while the typical student of any other race attends a school where students of color are the majority.<sup>11</sup> Recent research shows that school desegregation both narrowed the achievement gap *and* dramatically improved the intergenerational mobility of black students in the South.<sup>12</sup>

Fig. 7 Concentration of Poverty in Public Schools, Ten Largest N.C. Counties

	Share of public school students from low-income families	Share of low-income students in high-poverty schools	Share of non-low-income students in high-poverty schools	Share of black students in high-poverty schools	Share of white students in high-poverty schools
Mecklenburg	54%	54%	9%	49%	6%
Wake	34%	11%	1%	9%	1%
Guilford	57%	49%	9%	46%	9%
Forsyth	54%	40%	4%	36%	4%
Cumberland	58%	27%	8%	27%	9%
Durham	61%	42%	9%	36%	6%
Buncombe	54%	6%	1%	8%	2%
Gaston	57%	31%	7%	38%	13%
New Hanover	46%	27%	4%	35%	6%
Union	34%	31%	2%	32%	2%

Source: Urban Institute and Southern Education Foundation  
Note: Low-income means the share of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL). Low poverty: 0–25% FRPL. Mid-low: 26–50% FRPL. Mid-High: 51–75% FRPL. High: 76%+ FRPL.

NATIONAL RESEARCH ON IDENTIFYING GIFTED YOUTH

**Student experiences** between schools and within schools can vary dramatically based on income level and race or ethnicity. A working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research examined a school district that introduced universal screening for elementary school students for its academically gifted program, rather than relying on referrals, as it had previously. Under the referral system, the academically gifted program was far less

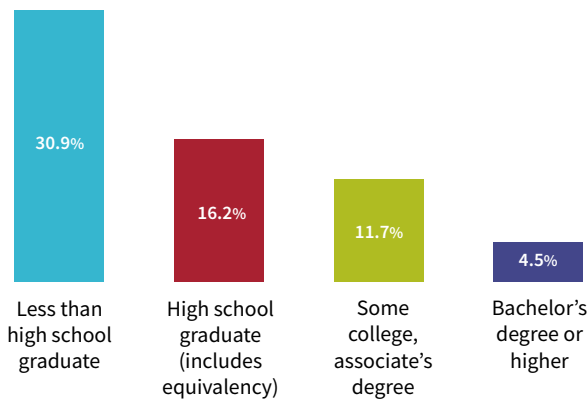
diverse than the district as a whole: less than a third of gifted students were black or Hispanic, even though three-fifths of the school district population was black or Hispanic. With universal screening, the number of economically disadvantaged students and students of color who met the academically gifted threshold increased dramatically. The number of low-income students identified as gifted increased by 180 percent, the number

of black students increased by 80 percent, and the number of Hispanic students increased by 130 percent. Unfortunately, this district had to switch back to a referral system after funding cuts, and the diversity of academically gifted students once again decreased.<sup>13</sup> Though this is just the story of one school district, it is a telling example of how the potential of low-income students and students of color is often overlooked.

### Educational Attainment

In order to improve economic mobility, all of North Carolina's children need a high-quality early childhood and K-12 education. That K-12 education will prepare them for success in postsecondary programs and careers. Educational attainment is a significant predictor of individual economic mobility. While 31 percent of people with less than a high school degree are in poverty, only 5 percent of people with a bachelor's degree or higher are.

**Fig. 8** Percent Below the Poverty Line by Educational Attainment, for Population 25 Years and Older, North Carolina



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

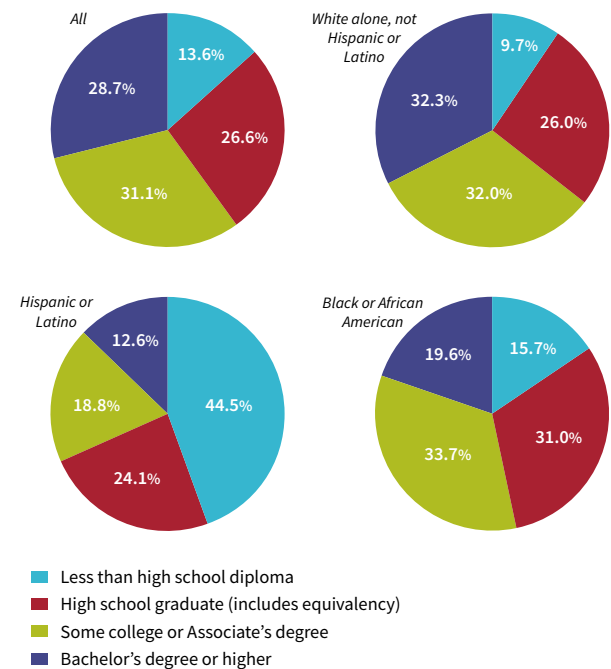
To get a sense of regional variation, we can look at these data by North Carolina Prosperity Zone, eight sub-state regions designated by the N.C. Department of Commerce to organize regional workforce and economic development efforts (see Appendix A for a map showing the boundaries of the prosperity zones and commuting zones). For all prosperity zones, approximately a third of people who did not graduate high school are in poverty, compared to only 4 and 6 percent of people with a bachelor's degree and higher (see Appendix A).

The benefits of educational attainment are not spread evenly across the population of North Carolina. Levels of educational attainment vary significantly by race and ethnicity (see Fig. 9).

There also are differences in educational attainment levels by region. Educational attainment levels are higher in the prosperity zones that contain major metropolitan areas and lower in the state's more rural regions. The North Central prosperity zone, which includes the Triangle, has the highest proportion of people with a bachelor's degree or higher, while the Northeast, Northwest, and Sandhills prosperity zones have the lowest. In the Northeast, Southeast, and Northwest zones, one in 10 or fewer African Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to one in five in the major metropolitan zones (see Appendix A).

These disparities in education levels by race and ethnicity and by region are not surprising because educational attainment is deeply tied to family income. There is a linear relationship between income

**Fig. 9** Educational Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over by Race and Ethnicity, North Carolina

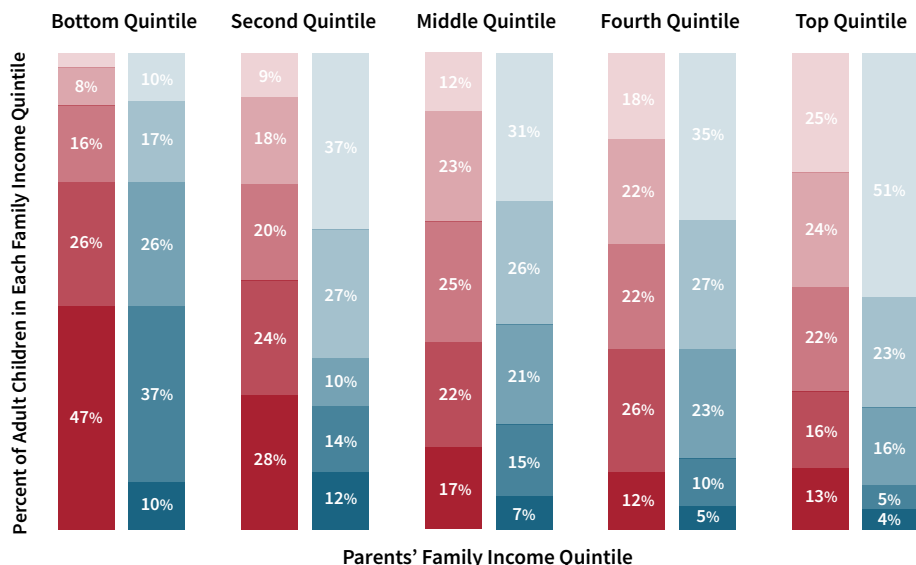


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

Note: Some college and Associate's degree are combined into one category; less than ten percent of the population of North Carolina has an Associate's degree as their highest level of education.

and who goes to college; with each percentile increase in the family income distribution, the rate of college attendance increases the same amount, according to Equality of Opportunity Project researchers.

While a young person's chances of college enrollment and success depend on family wealth, mobility increases dramatically for people with a four-year college degree no matter what their family's economic status: nationally, 47 percent of children born in the bottom quintile who don't get a four-year degree stay in the lowest quintile as an adult, while only 10 percent of children born in the lowest income quintile who graduate from college with a four-year degree remain in that quintile as adults. However, a college degree does not cancel out all of the effects of family income. Even with a four-year college degree, almost 40 percent of those who start in the lowest quintile move up just one quintile, meaning a college degree often doesn't put low-income young people on solid economic ground. There are many potential explanations for why four-year degrees have differential effects on earnings, including the effect of family assets or wealth. The racial wealth gap persists at all income and education levels, meaning young people of color are more constrained in college selectivity, more likely to have significant student debt, and will have less flexibility with choices they make about which jobs to pursue.

**Fig. 10 National Economic Mobility with a Four-Year College Degree***Chances of moving up or down the family income ladder, by education and parents' quintile*

*Nationally, 47 percent of children born in the bottom quintile who don't get a four-year degree stay in the lowest quintile as an adult, while only 10 percent of children born in the lowest income quintile who graduate from college with a four-year degree remain in that quintile.*

Source: Pew Charitable Trusts

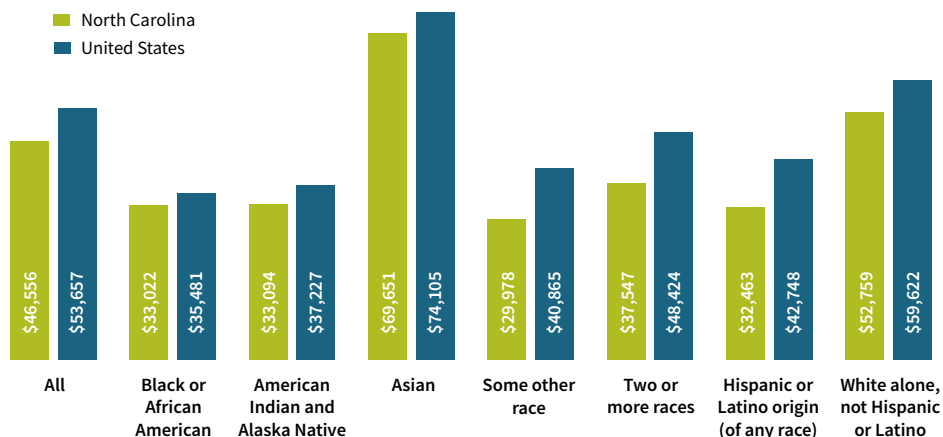
Note: Income is adjusted for family size.

Percent of Non-College Graduate Adult Children with Income in the:

Top Quintile  
Fourth Quintile  
Middle Quintile  
Second Quintile  
Bottom Quintile

Percent of College Graduate Adult Children with Income in the:

Top Quintile  
Fourth Quintile  
Middle Quintile  
Second Quintile  
Bottom Quintile

**Fig. 11 Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity, North Carolina**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

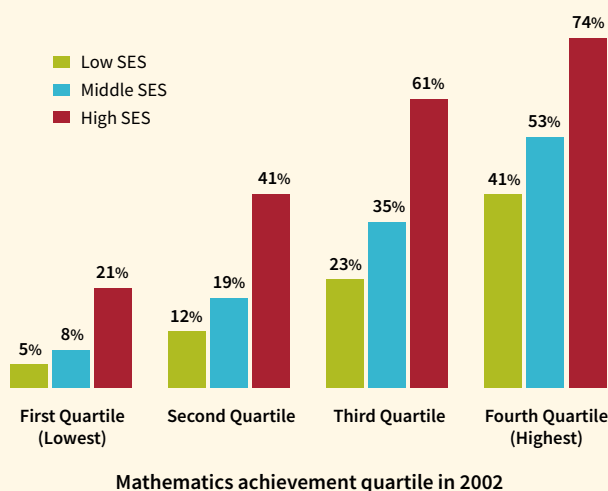
Note: The racial and ethnic categories are broad, and there is significant variation within racial and ethnic groups.

## NATIONAL RESEARCH ON DEGREE ATTAINMENT

**According to** a longitudinal study from the National Center for Education Statistics, high-achieving students from low-income families are as likely to complete a bachelor's degree as students from affluent families with below-average scores. The study follows a group of 2002 high school sophomores to learn about patterns of educational progress, degree completion, and aspirations. The study shows a dramatic difference in attainment by a student's socioeconomic status (SES), which considers the income, education level, and occupation of parents. Sixty percent of high SES students had a bachelor's degree at the end of the study period, while only 14 percent of low SES students did. The study also examines the different outcomes for students of the same achievement levels. Only forty-one percent of high-achieving, low-SES students get a bachelor's

degree—the same percentage as high-SES students with mathematics scores in the second lowest quartile. Degree completion is even more unequal than college enrollment, meaning many high-achieving, low-income students start college but do not have the resources and support systems to finish. There also is a large racial attainment gap for students in the middle and upper socioeconomic group: while 63 percent of high-SES white students got a bachelor's degree, only 43 percent of black students and 45 percent of Hispanic students did.<sup>14</sup> This disparity is consistent with data on the racial wealth gap, which persists across family income levels; median wealth for an upper-middle income white family is more than three times as much as that of an upper-middle income black family.<sup>15</sup>

*Percentage of spring 2002 high school sophomores who earned a bachelor's degree or higher by 2012, by socioeconomic status (SES) and mathematics achievement quartile in 2002*



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Note: Study does not look at completion of two-year degrees.

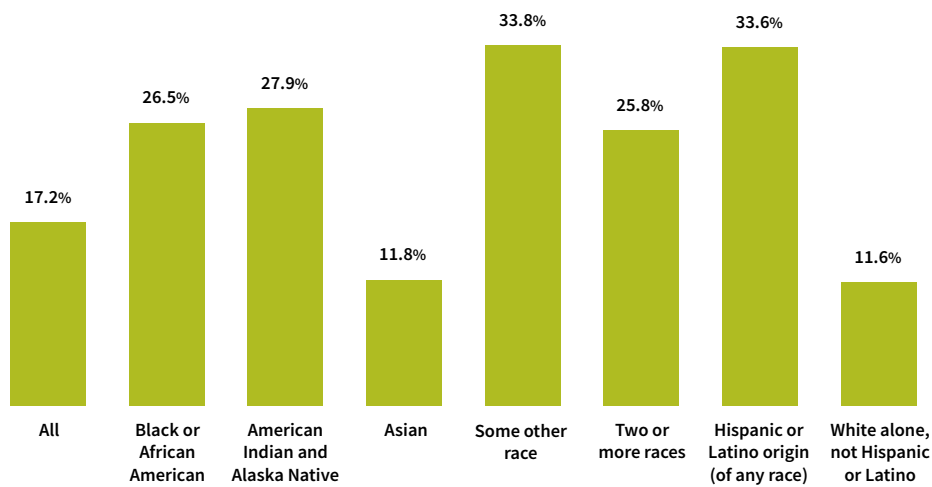
*High-achieving students from low-income families are as likely to complete a bachelor's degree as students from affluent families with below-average scores.*

Racial Disparities

The economic situation of a person’s parents matters tremendously to the likelihood of their educational and economic success, but the place they grow up matters, regardless of family income. Places with higher levels of residential segregation by race or income also tend to have lower levels of mobility.<sup>16</sup> In North Carolina, the economic prospects for low-income young people are not as strong

- as elsewhere in the nation, and there are substantial disparities
- by race and ethnicity in income, meaning low mobility affects
- some groups of people more than others. Median annual
- income is highest for white and Asian households. While every
- racial and ethnic group in N.C. has a lower median household
- income than in the U.S., the gap for Hispanic or Latino households
- is particularly large.

Fig. 12 Percent of People Below Poverty Level by Race and Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

*Low mobility perpetuates existing distinctions between socioeconomic classes and racial and ethnic groups, maintaining long standing inequities and preventing our communities from building inclusive political, economic, and social systems. With such deep disparities and such widespread economic insecurity, too many families are unable to make crucial investments in their own economic situation, including homeownership, continued education, and business creation, and they cannot provide a launching pad for their children’s educational and career development.*

Poverty rates also vary by race and ethnicity. While these gaps exist statewide, there is variation by region in overall poverty rates and the rates for racial and ethnic groups. Poverty is highest in the Sandhills, the Northeast, and the Northwest prosperity zones. The poverty rate for white people is highest in the Northwest and Western regions, where a larger proportion of the population is white, while the poverty rate for African Americans is particularly high in the Northeast Region, where the black population is large, and in the Western Region, where it is small (see Appendix A). People of color in North Carolina are overrepresented in lower income quintiles, and they are less likely to complete postsecondary education.

Disparities in these data tell a troubling tale: there is uneven access to opportunity across the state of North Carolina. Individual responsibility and personal drive are vital to a person's economic and educational success, but the data tell us that barriers to opportunity, stemming from poverty and lower quality education, minimize the chances of success for all but a few people from low-income families. While the family economic status of young people affects their educational and economic prospects everywhere, some places provide a better shot than others, and our state is among the worst for economic mobility. To summarize what we have learned so far:

- K-12 educational quality varies between and within districts, and this varied quality is exacerbated by the increasing segregation of low-income students, particularly low-income students of color.

- Individual economic mobility increases dramatically for people with a college degree no matter what their family's economic status was, but a young person's chances of college enrollment and success still depend on family wealth.
- People of color in North Carolina are overrepresented in lower income quintiles. This means that low levels of economic mobility in our state have a disproportionate effect on people of color. As long as mobility is low, we will continue to see disparities by race and ethnicity in income and educational attainment.

Low mobility perpetuates existing distinctions between socioeconomic classes and racial and ethnic groups, maintaining long standing inequities and preventing our communities from building inclusive political, economic, and social systems. With such deep disparities and such widespread economic insecurity, too many families are unable to make crucial investments in their own economic situation, including homeownership, continued education, and business creation, and they cannot provide a launching pad for their children's educational and career development. The state needs an infrastructure of opportunity that will provide a better chance and clearer path to economic success for all North Carolinians, no matter their economic background, race and ethnicity, or where they grow up, study, and work. ■

# BUILDING AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF OPPORTUNITY

The causes of economic immobility do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of systems that can both ease and impede individuals' access to opportunities. Improved access can often give them more control over economic outcomes for their families and, in many cases, break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The infrastructure of opportunity is made of myriad systems that connect people—youth and adults—to a path of upward mobility. The challenge for the state is to reconfigure and align systems within communities and regions to address the multitude of issues that prevent people from improving their economic status and, rather, enable them to tap more fully their own human potential. Those same issues often reduce the availability of skilled labor that can support economic expansion and growth. These include criminal justice issues that disconnect thousands of people from opportunity not only during incarceration, but also then prevent them from accessing employment opportunities after release. Another barrier might be poor transportation systems that prevent individuals from accessing jobs, and employers from getting qualified workers to their front door. It might also be basic needs such as access to food; thousands of North Carolinians live in “food deserts,” where healthy eating

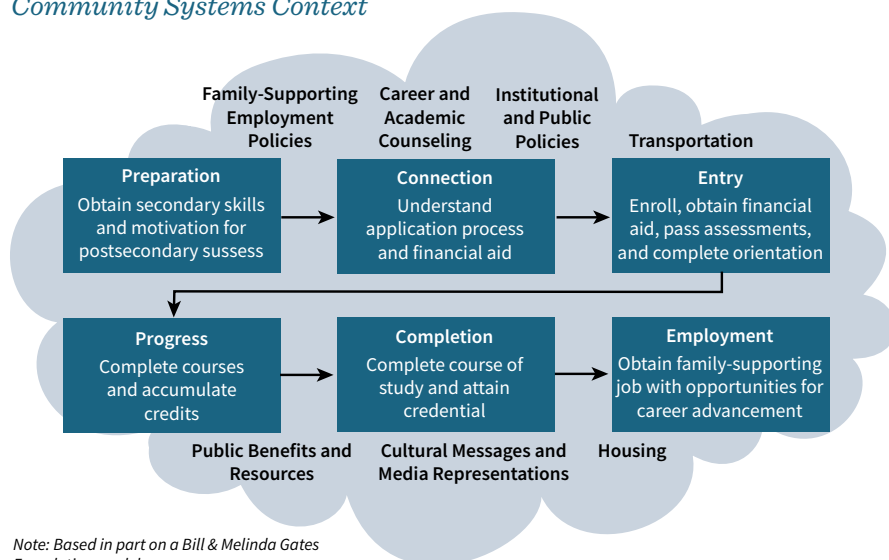
options are non-existent, even in the middle of some of the most fertile land in the country.

There is no, one silver bullet solution for addressing all these issues. In this report, we focus on the education-to-career continuum, a linkage of several systems within an infrastructure of opportunity, and one that many communities are already working to strengthen. A strong education-to-career continuum connects more people to the necessary postsecondary credentials and family-supporting employment needed for individuals and the state to thrive.

If North Carolina is to strengthen this education-to-career continuum, it needs first to identify the barriers that impede progress towards family-supporting work, the structures and interventions that encourage full participation in the community's economy, and the environmental forces that contribute to and work against postsecondary and economic success. Figure 13 illustrates a “loss-momentum framework” that highlights “loss points,” where progress along the continuum might be impeded, as well as “momentum points” that, if deployed to their full advantage, can increase the percentage of people who complete high-value postsecondary credentials and who can get jobs that pay a family-

Fig. 13 Preventing Loss, Creating Momentum

## Community Systems Context



*The infrastructure of opportunity is made of myriad systems that connect people—youth and adults—to a path of upward mobility.*

Note: Based in part on a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation model.

supporting wage.

There are two important issues to address here:

First, the loss-momentum framework emphasizes the stages of educational advancement that *young adults* can take towards finding stable and meaningful employment, but the ways in which adults and displaced workers access training and find jobs when they are either disconnected from

the workforce system or not currently engaged in family-supporting work are quite similar. In a state that has faced a dramatic shift in its employment structure (North Carolina once employed a higher percentage of its population in manufacturing than any other state), the needs of dislocated workers are of real concern. Understanding how to help older North Carolinians obtain the credentials and connections needed for good jobs is paramount in any system that is going to address the state's education and employment needs.

Second, this report's education data focus primarily on the community college experience. Community colleges are, by design, more closely tied to individual communities. They offer an affordable pathway to a four-year degree as well as technical degrees and credentials that lead directly to employment. With 58 such institutions across the state, 99 percent of North Carolinians are within 30 miles of a chance to pursue a postsecondary credential.<sup>17</sup> In addition, community college populations tend to have a much larger low-income enrollment than four-year universities, meaning these institutions are more likely to influence the mobility of individuals in the lower income distributions. Community colleges are a critical intellectual and educational infrastructure that improves the life-prospects of citizens and enhances the economy of states and communities. Community colleges are often the most nimble and responsive institutions to meet the most pressing needs of local employers.

## PREPARATION

The road to a quality education begins in early childhood—with studies consistently showing that quality early childhood education is essential to a student's academic success. Similarly, quality elementary and middle school education prepares students for the rigors of high school and a career. The state and distinct localities have focused much of their educational improvement efforts on vital high school preparation that encourages individuals to get the credentials they need to access good jobs. One key measure of a student's ability to enter a postsecondary institution is whether he or she completes high school. On this measure alone, North Carolina has made significant progress through the years. In 2010, high school graduation rates stood at 74.2 percent and in 2014 they were 83.9 percent, a significant improvement. There is a racial gap

**Fig. 14** High School Graduation Rates in North Carolina

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Change from 2010–2014
Black	71.5	74.7	77.5	79.9	82.2	10.7
White	82.6	84.7	86.2	87.1	88.3	5.7
<b>Gap</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>-5</b>

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

in terms of graduation rates, as Figure 14 shows, with black students graduating at a lower rate than their white counterparts, although the difference between the two has been declining in recent years.

But it is not just graduation that can prepare a student for higher education; student performance on standardized tests such as the ACT College Admission Exam can also be an indicator of students' preparation to succeed in a college environment. North Carolina administers the ACT to all 11th grade students. ACT sets benchmarks for the four subtests (reading, math, English, and science) and the writing essay. Across the state, over 29,000 11th grade students (30 percent) met the benchmark for all four subtests and 10,000 students (11 percent) reached the benchmark for all subtests and the writing essay.

**Fig. 15** North Carolina 2014–15 ACT Results for Grade 11 Students<sup>\*18</sup>

	Met All Four Benchmarks	Met All Four Plus Writing Benchmarks
North Central	8,135 (35%)	3,312 (14%)
Northeast	907 (20%)	247 (5%)
Northwest	1,572 (26%)	480 (8%)
Piedmont-Triad	5,108 (30%)	1,701 (10%)
Sandhills	1,770 (20%)	479 (5%)
Southeast	2,180 (24%)	729 (8%)
Southwest	7,981 (35%)	2,954 (13%)
Western	1,742 (30%)	601 (10%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,395 (30%)</b>	<b>10,503 (11%)</b>

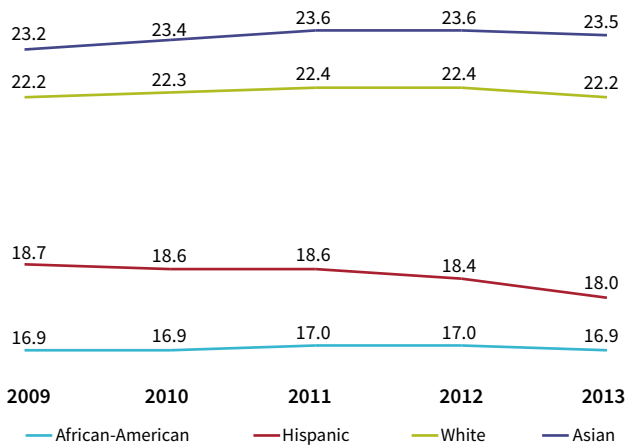
Source: Public Schools of North Carolina, Accountability Services Division

\* Data for school districts and charter schools with percentages of less than 5 percent were suppressed in DPI data. These data were included and calculated in this chart as 3 percent.

When national ACT scores are analyzed by race and ethnicity (Figure 16), Asian-American and white students on average perform better than other subgroups. The figure below shows a consistent racial scoring gap over the five-year period; the scores of white students are more than five points higher than black students.

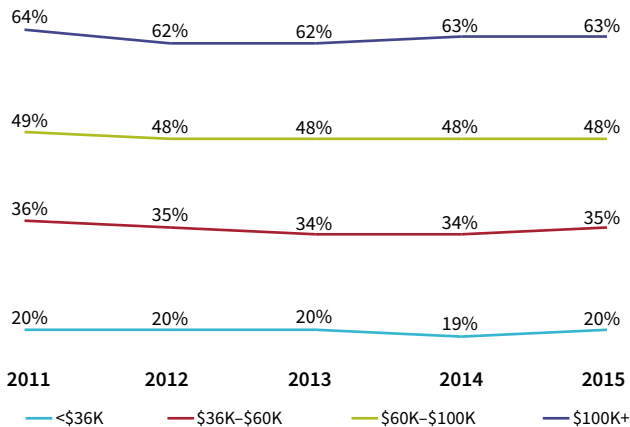


**Fig. 16 National Average ACT Composite Test Scores by Race/Ethnicity, 2009–2013**



Source: *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015, ACT*

**Fig. 17 Percent of 2011–2015 ACT-Test High School Graduates Meeting Three or More Benchmarks by Family Income**



Source: *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015, ACT*

Family income is also a predictor of ACT performance. Nationally, 63 percent of students from families with incomes of more than \$100,000 met three or more of the ACT benchmarks, compared to only 20 percent of low-income students (Figure 17).

The ACT may be one measure of academic preparedness, but many colleges have deemphasized the importance of standardized testing by making submission of SAT and ACT scores optional for students. North Carolina's Catawba College, Guilford College, and Wake Forest University are three such "test optional" institutions.

The North Carolina Community College System also recognized that high-stakes tests may not be the only indicator of subsequent success in college. The System recently implemented a new policy,

Multiple Measures for Placement, which allows recent high school graduates to demonstrate readiness for college-level courses through their high school GPA only, as long as they took the appropriate college prep courses. ACT and SAT scores are another option to indicate college readiness.

Two communities profiled in this report are emphasizing preparing students for the postsecondary experience. In Pitt County, students enrolled in the Health Sciences Academy can take six courses in high school that prepare them for careers in healthcare. The Academy is a joint collaborative between Pitt Community College, East Carolina University, and the public schools—and, just as importantly, local industry. A relatively new program in Wilkes County, Project ADMIT, offers students hands-on technical experience in manufacturing. The program uses instructors from Wilkes Community College and demonstrates the importance of preparing students not just for liberal arts disciplines but technology-based ones, as well.

## CONNECTION AND ENTRY

If students are to move from the state's high schools to postsecondary study, they need to make a tangible connection to institutions of higher learning. This connection can occur through effective counseling, where students are given the necessary information to understand their options and select a college that makes the most sense for them; in some cases it can even mean enrolling in college while they are finishing high school. The state is promoting dual-enrollment programs, where students enroll simultaneously at a community college while getting a high school diploma. The way the dual enrollment programs in the state are constructed has changed recently. The programs are now called Career and College Promise, and each student participant must pursue a more proscribed pathway to meet their goals. Previously, students could take classes that might not be relevant to their career or educational goals; now dual enrollees take a specific sequence of classes that can prepare them either for a postsecondary degree or a diploma or certificate in a technical discipline.

Since 2012, dual enrollment has increased by 24 percent. Dual-enrollment rates are fairly similar across the state, but there is a significant difference in enrollment when disaggregated by race. As Figure 18 shows, African-American students are not proportionately represented in dual-enrollment programs. African-American enrollment in dual enrollment programs is only 15 percent, lower than both their enrollment in public schools across the state and at community colleges. This racial gap in dual enrollment is unfortunately a fairly typical pattern in the South, with states such as Virginia and Texas having even more pronounced gaps than North Carolina.<sup>19</sup>

Ensuring that low-income families have access to college education is where mobility is often weakest. One way to measure access to postsecondary credentials for low-income students is to look at the number of students who are receiving Pell Grants, federal grants provided to students with demonstrated financial need.<sup>20</sup> Nearly 47 percent of North Carolina community college students enrolled in the fall of 2014 received Pell Grants. Broken down by

**Fig. 18** NC Community College System  
Dual Enrollment, Proportion by Race

	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014
White	12,826 (63%)	14,673 (63%)	15,843 (63%)
Black	3,246 (16%)	3,608 (15%)	3,715 (15%)
Hispanic	2,015 (10%)	2,524 (11%)	2,926 (12%)
Other	1,035 (5%)	1,259 (5%)	1,398 (5%)
Unknown	1,266 (6%)	1,234 (5%)	1,352 (5%)

Source: North Carolina Community College System

race, 66 percent of all African-American students, 39 percent of all white students, and 43 percent of all Hispanic students receive Pell Grants.

While the percentage of students who receive Pell Grants indicates that low-income students have some support to pay for college, it also suggests challenges for students to stay on the path to completion. One challenge is basic: the funds available through Pell Grants have not kept pace with the soaring costs of attending college.<sup>21</sup> But tuition is not the only barrier; situations such as health care emergencies, child care needs, and transportation challenges can force low-income students to interrupt their college studies.

Research has shown that community college students who stop their education are most likely to do so due to financial challenges. According to researchers at Public Agenda, 54 percent of students who stopped their college education pointed to “having to work and make money” as the primary reason for leaving before attaining a credential.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the most impressive efforts aimed at connecting students to college are happening in Guilford County. (A full profile of Guilford County is included later in this report). “Say Yes to Education” is a new, countywide commitment to all students who graduate high school that they will be able to afford college. The program provides funds to cover tuition expenses that remain after other financial aid is accounted for, but also includes other services such as tutoring or mentoring to encourage students to believe, starting in elementary school, that college is a place where all students belong.

PROGRESS

Enrolling in college does not always mean that an individual is making significant progress toward a degree. Many students must enroll in developmental education—classes designed to provide students without sufficient preparation for postsecondary study the knowledge and skills to thrive academically. Fifty-two percent of students are coming to North Carolina community colleges academically underprepared and must enroll in at least one developmental class.<sup>23</sup> Credits earned in developmental education do not count toward a degree or credential, meaning that it takes developmental education students longer to complete their studies and increases their chances for disruption in their academic progression. Data on other community college students show how

SUCCESS COACHES

Central Carolina Community College serves students in Chatham, Harnett, and Lee Counties. The college enrolls about 5,000 curriculum students every year, as well as supporting distance education students and an early college program on the Lee County campus. In an effort to improve student retention, persistence, and success, the college provides every curriculum student with a Success Coach. Using an online interface and in-person meetings, Success Coaches support the academic planning process by building personal relationships with students, helping them set personal and academic goals in a Student Success Plan, develop college success strategies, and manage transitions—into college and on to a career. While Success Coaches do not replace faculty advisors, tutors, or psychological counselors, they can connect students with resources to ensure each student has all the support he or she needs. The web-based technology enables the coaches and the college to manage caseloads and track progress. After using federal grants to launch the College Success Center and embed coaches into targeted departments in 2013, the colleges have seen a 13 percent increase in student persistence. These promising results helped them secure additional federal funds—a “First in the World” grant from the U.S. Department of Education—to expand the program to nine other community colleges in North Carolina.

challenging it is to make postsecondary progress—and not just for students who struggle academically. In North Carolina, only 67 percent of the students who complete at least 12 credit hours with a C or above enroll the following fall semester. Though this is in line with national averages, it emphasizes the influence of non-academic barriers. Nationally, only 53 percent of all students at public, two-year colleges return after their first year, regardless of their academic performance.<sup>24</sup>

Helping students deal with non-academic challenges that impede progress is an important strategy several community colleges across the state are pursuing, instituting programs to help students get access to public benefits such as earned income tax credits and health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. These benefits allow students to continue in school without interruption. Some colleges have gone even further to reach students. Single Stop, a national program that has received funding from the John M. Belk Endowment, is operating in four community colleges in North Carolina, providing students with eligibility screening for public benefits and financial coaching and education to help them manage financial crises. According to Single Stop, accessing public benefits can have a dramatic increase in student retention—with rates improving by double digits in many instances.

## COMPLETION

Of course, progress without credential completion is problematic. And completion rates at North Carolina's community colleges, like those throughout the country, are lower than leaders would like. In North Carolina, 40 percent of students either complete their curriculum or transfer to another degree-bearing institution.<sup>26</sup> While completion rates should not be seen as the ultimate measure of a community college's preparation of its students, the increasing need for credentials expected by the state and nation's employers make these statistics problematic.

There is promise in the performance of the students who then transfer to a four-year institution in the University of North Carolina system. This transfer process has been made easier in recent years through the introduction of a revised Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the UNC system and the state's community college systems. The new agreement better defines the course pathways students enrolled at community colleges will need to take if their goal is transferring to a four-year college. Each year more than 8,000 students transfer from a North Carolina community college to one of the campuses in the UNC system, and their performance at the university level is on par with that of students who started their postsecondary experience at the university level. The grade point average during the first year after transfer for community college students has increased every year since 2009, from 2.89 to 2.95 in 2014. In total, 85 percent of community college students who transfer to a UNC institution have GPAs of 2.00 or higher once they are enrolled; 51 percent have GPAs of 3.0 or higher—statistics that are on par with students who transfer from a UNC institution to another institution within the university system.<sup>27</sup> Sixty-six percent of students who transfer from a North Carolina community college with an associate's degree earn a bachelor's degree within four years of transfer, only 3 percent lower than the rate for students who start and finish at the same UNC institution. Students who transfer without first completing an associate's degree do not fare as well, with only a 55 percent completion rate.

This high performance rate of community college students at the university level is critical when examining issues of mobility. Often, lower-income students may need to start their education at a local community college due to financial pressures—the fact that this approach is not unduly penalizing them speaks well for the community college system's ability to provide better access to a wide range of students.

*Each year more than 8,000 students transfer from a North Carolina community college to one of the campuses in the UNC system, and their performance at the university level is on par with that of students who started their postsecondary experience at the university level.*

Encouraging completion has been an emphasis of many in the state in recent years. Five community colleges received funding to participate in a national program, Completion by Design, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to address the barriers students face in getting a credential. The program is spreading to other community colleges and is supported by state-level policies aimed at improving completion rates in the system as a whole.

## CONNECTION TO EMPLOYMENT

While obtaining a postsecondary education is a critical way to increase economic mobility, movement up the economic ladder will be stalled without a job. Yet not any job will do. If individuals are to improve their economic prospects, they need access to good jobs. We define a good job as one that pays a family-supporting wage, provides access to benefits such as health insurance, retirement savings, paid vacation, and sick leave, and provides real potential for career advancement. Increasing connection to employment has been a focus of federal, state, and local governments in recent years. The reauthorization of the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and reorganization of the state-level workforce development system is placing a premium on making sure individuals are trained for jobs that actually exist in the marketplace.<sup>28</sup>

Efforts aimed at revamping the workforce development system focus more on collaboration between such entities as the community college system, local workforce development boards, and public school systems. Strategies include building formal career pathways that align secondary and postsecondary curricula and provide work-based learning opportunities from local employers, showing individuals how to prepare themselves for jobs in growing industries. Manufacturing Awareness Week in Monroe, N.C., is an example of how city and county government, a community college, public schools, and employers can come together to introduce individuals to new career options, with a direct connection to the required training.

## CONNECTION TO JOBS THAT PAY WELL IS A KEY TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY

A family-supporting wage is the hourly rate a North Carolinian who is sole provider must earn to support his or her family. While the minimum wage is a standard most Americans are familiar with, in most cases a minimum wage does not provide enough for individuals to support themselves and a family.

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have devised a wage calculator based on the cost of living and taxes where families live.<sup>29</sup> The calculation is adjusted based on the size of the household and assumes an individual is working full-time. For this study, we use the wage threshold required to support a family comprising one adult and one child in North Carolina; in 2014 that figure was \$21.63 per hour. In North Carolina, like most Southern states, the great majority of jobs do not meet this family-supporting standard. Only 26 percent of jobs in the state have median hourly earnings that pay above the wage needed for households with one adult and one child to cover basic living expenses. The forecast

for future jobs is not any better: without a change in pay ranges for occupations, this percentage holds true for new and existing jobs through 2024.<sup>31</sup> The low-wage profile of North Carolina’s job environment is prevalent throughout the state, but is more pronounced in certain prosperity zones. It is important to note that there are different family-supporting wage calculations in each county. Housing, taxes, and transportation costs in each county affect the wage needed for a single parent with a child to cover expenses. Individuals in rural counties often have higher transportation costs associated with a commute to regional employment hubs. Similarly, housing costs in rural counties bordering urban areas also tend to be higher.

The minimum amount of money a person with a child can earn to cover their basic living expenses in any county in North Carolina is \$20.92 per hour, slightly lower than the state as a whole. Thus, the minimum family-supporting wage for one adult and one child in any prosperity zone is \$20.92. However, several counties in the state have a much higher family-supporting wage amount and require higher wages to meet basic monthly living expenses. For example, a person living in Warren County in the North Central prosperity zone will need to make \$20.92 as an hourly wage to support themselves and a child. A person living in Wake County, also in the North Central prosperity zone, will need to make \$22.40 an hour to meet their everyday needs and that of a child. Figure 19 shows the percentage of jobs in each region that pay more than a family-supporting wage. Because family-supporting wages are calculated on a county basis, we have included the percentage of jobs that pay more than the county with the lowest family-supporting wage in each prosperity zone, as well as the family-supporting wage for the county with the prosperity zone’s highest family-supporting wage.

The percentage of jobs with a median hourly wage above \$21.63, our base family-supporting wage for this report based on supporting one adult and one child, varies with the types of jobs in each region. Prosperity zones dominated by North Carolina’s largest urban areas, with research institutions and corporate headquarters, have a higher percentage of jobs that exceed the family-supporting wage minimum. Job growth in the prosperity zones that include Wake and Mecklenburg are projected to create the greatest number of new jobs, of which more than 32 percent will be in higher-wage occupations.

FAMILY-SUPPORTING WAGE

*For this report, we focus on the family-supporting wage for one adult and one child.<sup>30</sup> The table below shows what the rate would be for a variety of different family compositions. It shows that while some work paying a lower rate could support a person living alone, as their family grows, their financial burden grows.*

North Carolina’s Family-Supporting Wage by Family Composition

	Family-Supporting Wage	Minimum Wage
1 Adult	\$10.53	\$7.25
1 Adult 1 Child	\$21.63	\$7.25
1 Adult 2 Children	\$25.83	\$7.25
1 Adult 3 Children	\$32.34	\$7.25
2 Adults (One Working)	\$16.89	\$7.25
2 Adults (One Working) 1 Child	\$20.46	\$7.25
2 Adults (One Working) 2 Children	\$23.09	\$7.25

Source: Massachusetts of Technology, Living Wage Calculator

Fig. 19 Family-Supporting Wage for One Adult and One Child by Prosperity Zone

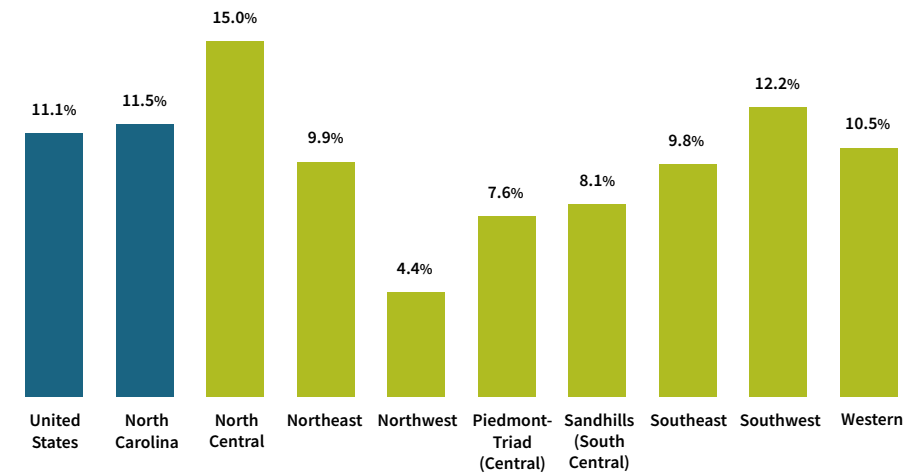
Prosperity Zone	Lowest County Family-Supporting Rate in Prosperity Zone	Percent of Jobs Paying Above	Highest County Family-Supporting Rate in Prosperity Zone	Percent of Jobs Paying Above
North Central	\$20.92	35%	\$22.40	32%
Northeast	\$20.92	20%	\$24.26	14%
Northwest	\$20.92	18%	\$22.07	15%
Piedmont-Triad	\$20.92	25%	\$21.41	24%
Sandhills	\$20.92	18%	\$22.13	15%
Southeast	\$20.92	18%	\$22.14	16%
Southwest	\$20.92	32%	\$22.11	31%
Western	\$20.92	19%	\$21.53	17%

Source: EMSI and MIT Living Wage Project

Given the current wage structure, growth in these urban areas is likely to exacerbate the geographic disparity in family-supporting employment in the future. As Figure 20 shows, the North Central region is forecast to have the greatest growth in the state through 2024, at 15 percent, while the more rural zones, such as Northwest, have little forecasted growth.

The challenges in creating more family-supporting opportunities are many. Encouraging growth in industries that traditionally pay higher wages, particularly those outside the service and retail sector, for example, could yield higher wages. There also is a direct correlation between wages and higher education. Figure 21 shows that the more advanced education you receive, the more likely you

Fig. 20 Projected Employment Growth (Jobs) by Prosperity Zone, 2014–2024



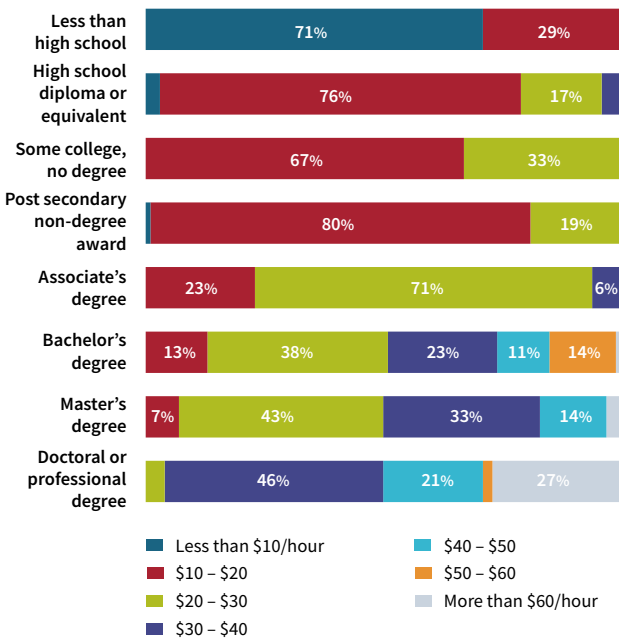
Source: EMSI 2015.1 — QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

are to have a higher wage rate. For instance, only 21 percent of entry-level jobs that typically require a high school credential or greater have a median hourly wage above the family-supporting wage to support an adult and a child. Compare that figure with those that require an associate's degree: 77 percent pay at least \$20 an hour, which is close to a family-supporting wage needed to support a person and his or her child.

National studies point towards the need for more credentials. In a 2013 report by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, researchers forecast educational demand by occupation for all employees, and not just entry-level employment for existing jobs. The Center found that entry-level requirements for jobs today are almost universally higher than entry-level requirements in the past. Assuming incremental

*Only 21 percent of entry-level jobs that typically require a high school credential or greater have a median hourly wage above the family-supporting wage to support an adult and a child.*

Fig. 21 Jobs by Median Hourly Wage Level, 2014 North Carolina



Source: EMSI 2015.1 — QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

changes in skill needs and education will continue, the Center estimates that by 2020, 67 percent of all new jobs in North Carolina, including individuals hired to replace retiring workers, will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.<sup>32</sup> Of course, for this trend to continue it is clear that the state and regions will need to work to encourage growth in high skill jobs that require an increase in skills, and pay higher wages.

Right now, it remains troubling that some jobs requiring a postsecondary credential still pay below a family-supporting wage. For instance, Figure 22 shows all health science occupations that pay

- less than a family-supporting wage for an adult and a child; all require a postsecondary degree. These are also some of the fastest growing jobs in the state.

The challenges presented here also present an opportunity to use stackable credentials to access better jobs for individuals who start with lower paying jobs but put themselves on a trajectory to increase their income through additional education. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Labor uses the notion of a good job in its definition of what is a stackable credential: a stackable credential is “part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over

**Fig. 22 Health Science Careers Paying Less than a Family-Supporting Wage for One Adult and One child**

Description (SOC*)	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	% Growth (Loss)	Typical Entry Level Education	Median Hourly Earnings
Recreational Therapists — (29-1125)	524	565	7.80%	Bachelor's degree	\$20.76
Exercise Physiologists — (29-1128)	622	680	9.30%	Bachelor's degree	\$20.29
Therapists, All Other — (29-1129)	597	755	26.50%	Bachelor's degree	\$21.22
Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technicians — (29-2012)	8,660	10,682	23.30%	Associate's degree	\$18.84
Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics — (29-2041)	10,145	11,676	15.10%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$14.97
Dietetic Technicians — (29-2051)	394	480	21.80%	Associate's degree	\$12.32
Psychiatric Technicians — (29-2053)	3,251	3,280	0.90%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$13.98
Respiratory Therapy Technicians — (29-2054)	267	315	18.00%	Associate's degree	\$19.78
Surgical Technologists — (29-2055)	3,023	3,730	23.40%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$18.35
Veterinary Technologists and Technicians — (29-2056)	3,541	4,426	25.00%	Associate's degree	\$13.85
Ophthalmic Medical Technicians — (29-2057)	1,755	2,013	14.70%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$15.53
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses — (29-2061)	16,501	19,101	15.80%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$20.04
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians — (29-2071)	5,118	6,042	18.10%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$15.44
Athletic Trainers — (29-9091)	551	683	24.00%	Bachelor's degree	\$18.62
Nursing Assistants — (31-1014)	52,105	57,944	11.20%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$10.73
Massage Therapists — (31-9011)	5,035	6,268	24.50%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$16.01
Dental Assistants — (31-9091)	9,575	11,540	20.50%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$17.60
Medical Assistants — (31-9092)	14,735	17,932	21.70%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$13.98
Medical Transcriptionists — (31-9094)	2,300	2,701	17.40%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$15.58
Phlebotomists — (31-9097)	3,973	4,960	24.80%	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$13.29

Source: EMSI 2015.1 — QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

Note: Standard Occupational Classification - The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System is a United States government system of classifying occupations. It is used by U.S. federal government agencies collecting occupational data, enabling comparison of occupations across data sets. It is designed to cover all occupations in which work is performed for pay or profit, reflecting the current occupational structure in the United States. The 2010 SOC includes 840 occupational types. Users of occupational data include government program managers, industrial and labor relations practitioners, students considering career training, job seekers, vocational training schools, and employers wishing to set salary scales or locate a new plant.

time to build up an individual's qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs.<sup>33</sup> NCWorks, a new state-level cross-agency workforce development collaboration, includes stackable credentials as a key element as it encourages regions and communities to develop new pathways to family-supporting wage jobs and ultimately careers.

- Many of the jobs with a significant number of openings, regardless of their industry, require additional levels of education. This means that employers have a vested interest in making sure more individuals are advancing on the education-to-career continuum. Figure 23 lists some of the occupations in North Carolina that are facing significant projected gaps between the availability of jobs and the numbers of projected completers



produced by the state's postsecondary institutions. Without more students completing these programs, the industries that depend on these occupations will not be able to contribute as effectively to the growth of the state and individual prosperity zones.

It is also important to consider where the best opportunities for family-supporting wage jobs are at the regional level. Appendix B contains charts that show the occupations that both pay a family-supporting wage and are showing significant projected growth. Job creation strategies that focus specifically on jobs that meet these

criteria will go a long way to addressing issues of economic mobility.

A strong education-to-career continuum ensures individuals have the ability to contribute to the positive growth of communities and the private enterprises that drive our state's economy. Yet this continuum is just one part of an infrastructure of opportunity. In the next section of the report, we offer some steps that communities and the state can take to build an infrastructure of opportunity for all North Carolinians. ■

**Fig. 23** Projected Gaps in Job Availability and Credential Completers

	Median Hourly Earnings	Annual Openings (2014–2024)	Statewide Completions (2013)	Gap
Dentists, General (29–1021)	\$89.02	184	145	(39)
Industrial Engineers (17–2112)	\$37.31	306	196	(110)
Environmental Engineers (17–2081)	\$34.78	69	41	(28)
Dental Hygienists (29–2021)	\$32.81	348	300	(48)
Operations Research Analysts (15–2031)	\$30.95	118	65	(53)
Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists (29–2011)	\$27.49	260	204	(56)
Electrical and Electronics Repairers, Commercial and Industrial Equipment (49–2094)	\$25.23	68	18	(50)
Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers (49–9051)	\$25.15	227	44	(183)
Medical Equipment Repairers (49–9062)	\$23.09	84	35	(49)
Chemical Technicians (19–4031)	\$20.93	89	57	(32)
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers (21–1023)	\$20.83	161	125	(36)
Biological Technicians (19–4021)	\$19.48	102	62	(40)
Dental Laboratory Technicians (51–9081)	\$19.24	71	29	(42)
Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technicians (29–2012)	\$19.13	440	199	(241)
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers, All Other (49–9099)	\$18.58	142	127	(15)
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters (47–2152)	\$18.46	406	67	(339)
Machinists (51–4041)	\$18.15	491	388	(103)
Upholsterers (51–6093)	\$16.73	174	8	(166)
Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics (29–2041)	\$15.32	420	347	(73)
Cabinetmakers and Bench Carpenters (51–7011)	\$14.37	84	18	(66)
Medical Secretaries (43–6013)	\$14.32	534	363	(171)
Healthcare Support Workers, All Other (31–9099)	\$13.66	139	96	(43)
Pharmacy Technicians (29–2052)	\$13.30	390	290	(100)
Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers (27–1026)	\$12.85	90	61	(29)
Sawing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Wood (51–7041)	\$12.83	97	18	(79)
Helpers—Pipefitters, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters (47–3015)	\$12.80	102	67	(35)
Woodworking Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Except Sawing (51–7042)	\$12.68	89	18	(71)
Nursing Assistants (31–1014)	\$10.66	1,655	200	(1,455)
Home Health Aides (31–1011)	\$9.00	1,617	67	(1,550)

Source: 2015.1 — QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

Note: Standard Occupational Classification — The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System is a United States government system of classifying occupations. It is used by U.S. federal government agencies collecting occupational data, enabling comparison of occupations across data sets. It is designed to cover all occupations in which work is performed for pay or profit, reflecting the current occupational structure in the United States. The 2010 SOC includes 840 occupational types. Users of occupational data include government program managers, industrial and labor relations practitioners, students considering career training, job seekers, vocational training schools, and employers wishing to set salary scales or locate a new plant.

# TAKING ACTION: PRIORITIES AND FIRST STEPS

**T**he data on economic mobility in North Carolina—and across the South—illustrate the economic and civic imperative for the community- and institutional-level analysis and action required to change systems—so that outcomes can change. In order to make progress as a state, to rebuild economic prosperity and opportunity and remain a place that generates innovative ideas and attracts industry and talent, we have to make progress for individuals where they are—in our rural towns and our metropolitan centers. As we profiled eight communities across the state, we looked for evidence of vision and practices that generate forward motion for individuals and communities.

We saw efforts that were inspiring and some that were insufficient; there are examples of progress and opportunities for more deliberate action. Considering the forgoing quantitative data and the community profiles, it is clear the state needs to build a more robust infrastructure of opportunity to ensure North Carolinians have a clear path to family-supporting work and sustained economic wellbeing, that employers have the workforce they need to grow and innovate in their sectors, and that our civic culture is one that supports prosperity for all.

A strong infrastructure of opportunity means systems are aligned so young people and adults whose progress toward economic security has been stalled can connect to education and a family-supporting job with career potential. Such an infrastructure is beyond the reach of any one institution to create: discrete pockets of excellence are insufficient for changing the opportunity trajectory and improving education and employment outcomes at scale. To move from discrete programming to an aligned infrastructure of opportunity requires applying the whole system approach to analysis, planning, and implementation, with input from educational institutions, employers, local government, philanthropy, and community-based organizations. A whole systems approach encompasses the many transition points along the education-to-career continuum, as well as the political, cultural, and social environment in which that continuum exists—the rest of the infrastructure of opportunity. Effective management of such an approach is greatly enhanced by a partnership approach to governance, oversight, and assessment—with all parts of the system appropriately represented and all players represented, from senior leadership to operational staff to end users and those with a stake in the outcomes. Alignment alone isn't enough; communities need mechanisms for gathering information and funding commitments to ensure there is both quality and equitable access and outcomes along an education-to-career continuum that undergirds the broader infrastructure of opportunity.

Community members must take an honest look at their history and current educational and economic outcomes, orchestrate a common understanding of the end goal, include a plurality of voices in visioning and leadership, courageously deploy existing resources, and pursue necessary changes to create a culture of continuous

improvement that drives systems reform. And if the end goal is increased mobility and broader economic security, there must be a commitment to family-supporting work with career potential and the accompanying policies that make such work more widespread and sustainable. Local decision makers need to consider how well the community is currently organized, assess where and why it is falling short of its potential to generate ample opportunity for economic advancement, and ask whether a compelling and inclusive vision of economic security exists. Communities seeking to build an infrastructure of opportunity will:

- Adopt a guiding framework for analysis and action that is grounded in a common vision of economic productivity and advancement for the community and its people.
- Design and implement research-based policies and programs that: can be scaled for an entire population, hold high expectations for educators, employers, and the workforce, and maintain momentum through continuous improvement.
- Commit to providing adequate resources that support the common vision.

## BUILDING A COMMON VISION OF ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

**1** Use local data to understand history, analyze current educational and economic outcomes, and identify gaps in the education-to-career continuum. Good planning requires good data. Communities should begin by disaggregating data, identifying outcome disparities across race, gender, family status, and wealth, and uncover root causes. To begin an assessment of the continuum, consider mapping performance for both young people and disengaged adults along the Loss-Momentum framework:

**Preparation :: Connection :: Entry :: Progress :: Completion :: Career**

More specifically, community leaders should ask themselves: “Where are people leaving the system or ending their educational trajectory too early? Where are the successes?” These analyses may require difficult conversations about how to recognize and respond to disparities.

Another critical piece of analysis is reviewing current expenditures across sectors to determine how well community investments are aligned to provide desired economic mobility outcomes. Such an analysis can uncover misalignment as well as sources of flexible capital within institutions. Other important analyses include consideration of regional influences on education



and employment and access to both. That means looking at how the community's geography and market structure affect everything from the labor force to business attraction to commute times.

► **Wilmington's Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Violence** used analysis of local data to guide their decisions about how and where to act. The Commission of leaders from the faith-based community, private businesses, local nonprofits, and elected officials is charged with coordinating resources, with a focus on youth ages 0–24 and their families. They began their work with an assessment of food insecurity, school dropouts, and gang violence, as well as a scan of community resources and organizations. The analysis informed the creation of a Youth Enrichment Zone, a geographical area in the city where they target programmatic activity and investment. *For more about the work in Wilmington, see the community profile on page 69.*

**2** *Commit to a common vision for creating pathways to family-supporting work that allow more individuals to build wealth and thrive in the community.* This integrating vision should focus on the intersection of economic competitiveness and equity to create wealth in a way that lifts people up, particularly those stuck—generation-to-generation—at the lower-end of the income distribution. This might mean shifting from a “culture of extraction”—low-wage work that delivers benefit to a small portion of the population—to a “culture of contribution”—quality jobs that provide economic security across the income spectrum. In other words, the goal is not just to create any job, but to create jobs that provide secure wages and career potential.

In order to identify a viable economic future that can also close equity gaps, communities and institutions need to understand emerging economic development opportunities, whether they can deliver sufficient economic lift, and whether education and training programs are aligned and capable of preparing people for those opportunities. If those opportunities aren't available or if the education-to-career system isn't sufficiently strong, the focus should be a data-based analysis of where family-supporting work is and the strategies needed to develop those jobs and the requisite training. Input on what goes into such a vision must include decision makers with positional power as well as marginalized communities; those perceived as outliers may be powerful indicators of the invisible ways in which the system is underperforming.

► **In Monroe, questions about alignment of training and labor needs are taken up by the Manufacturing Executives Roundtable and the Workforce Development Coalition**, both led by the Union County Chamber of Commerce. The Roundtable industry executives meet quarterly to identify issues that require collective action and benchmark their progress on those issues. The education-business connection is strengthened by the Coalition, which includes employers, large and small, as well as

the community college, the K–12 system, and the workforce development system. *For more about the work in Monroe, see the community profile on page 63.*

## *Design, implement, and continuously improve scalable policies and programs with high expectations*

**3** *Seek out opportunities to participate in and learn from national, regional, or state-level initiatives and learning communities.* There are lighthouse communities across the region and within the state—including some of those included in this report—that can be models, suggesting helpful policies and practices you could adopt and identifying pitfalls communities may encounter. It is important for communities to review performance data and stories about the process as they consider how effective approaches could be translated and applied to another municipality.

► **When the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro and the United Way of Greater Greensboro** convened in 2011 a community task force to develop a shared vision of economic success, members made a deliberate decision to align Guilford County with national initiatives, joining learning networks of other communities with similar economic challenges and goals, as well as leveraging national funding to support the work. That decision has resulted in investment from Lumina Foundation, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Walmart Foundation, and others. *For more about the work in Guilford County, see the community profile on page 34.*

**4** *Embrace planning and implementation practices that engage each part of the system: from individuals to institutions.* Good planning requires attention to and engagement of the whole system; that means every level of the education system, small and large employers, and all municipal governments with attention to the representatives from each of those sectors: Who has control over resource decisions? Who is most familiar with day-to-day operations? Who can best foresee unintended consequences of particular actions or changes?

Whole system engagement requires deliberate inclusion of historically marginalized communities. The places and people in the most extreme distress reveal system failures most clearly: who is economically insecure and how will they be involved in leadership of the effort? When these issues are addressed, the entire community benefits. With broader engagement, be conscious of how traditional structures—from meeting place to meeting time—may need to change to accommodate wider participation.

► **Western Carolina University** is practicing this kind of engagement through programs like “Telling Our Story,” an opportunity for first-generation and low-income students to share their stories and celebrate their successes with Chancellor David Belcher, the WCU Board of Trustees, and donors. The Chancellor and a steering committee of college administrators, local community leaders, and employers also conducted a region-wide listening tour as the foundation for their most recent strategic plan. After traveling the region speaking with residents about their needs, they adopted a plan focused on economic development, academic excellence, and even more community engagement. *For more about the work in Western North Carolina, see the community profile on page 76.*

**5** *Encourage large institutions and employers to take the lead in innovation and cooperation.* To support a strong education-to-career continuum that aligns with workforce needs, both higher education institutions and employers must be nimble, responsive to local needs, and have the ability to shift focus as economic opportunity shifts. This requires leadership that listens and participates in secondary and postsecondary discussions as well as workforce planning, and understands there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to creating good jobs and connecting people to family-supporting work. Community colleges and regional universities, with their focused mission and local connections, are particularly important in this regard, especially in rural areas, where community colleges are often the only postsecondary institution in their community. They serve as a workforce trainer, leading employer, community convener, cultural ambassador, and change agent—essential roles in the task of building an infrastructure of opportunity.

Effective education systems need relationships with local industry leaders who do more than serve on advisory boards, but are able and willing to bear the risk of trying new approaches and contribute their expertise and resources to community visioning to build better pathways. This includes providing necessary leadership, insight, and financial resources for programs like work-based learning, apprenticeships, and career development for the future workforce and current workers.

► **In Wilkes County**, these education and industry links led to the formation of the **Business Industrial and Educational Forum (BIEF)**, a partnership among the community college, Economic Development Council, and school system, with an aim of exploring how to produce better qualified employees for local industry. BIEF's efforts have led to some innovative programs, including a teaching externship that pays local high school teachers to spend a day with a local employer to learn about the technical and workplace skills necessary for the industry. *For more about the work in Wilkes County, see the community profile on page 41.*

**6** *Cultivate investment and assume potential in the emergent workforce.* Communities with strong institutions and systems are ones where leaders act on a belief that talent is everywhere in their community and invest in people to develop and unleash that talent. In some communities, people with access to resources are often unaware of the human capacity in their community and may be skeptical of the aspirations of low-wealth people. Communities that fully invest in the capacity of their people work toward universal pre-K, ensure the quality of all public K-12 schools, set high expectations for postsecondary attainment early on, and create ways for dislocated workers to get additional education and training.

► **In Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren Counties**, secondary and postsecondary education leaders committed to changing the conversation about student success. That involved building the capacity of parents and students to get the most out of their education, as well as establishing clear pathways to education and careers. Vance Granville Community College is central to nearly every educational and career pathway in the area, with diverse offerings and partnerships. The college and local school system recently established early-college programs in each of the four counties, graduating students with a two-year degree. The goal is that students will be prepared to transfer to a four-year university for future study or have completed training that is aligned with the needs local employers. *For more about the work in Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren Counties, see the community profile on page 55.*

## *Commit to providing adequate resources that support the common vision*

**7** *Free up resources to address gaps in the education-to-career continuum.* In environments of scarcity, communities and institutions must have the courage to allocate resources to reflect the challenges identified on the education-to-career continuum. Too often, resources are siloed and spent based on historical habits, not aligned to a vision of the future. With the growing pressure to do more with less, communities need to marshal partners, rigorous data, and courage to reallocate resources to support an infrastructure of opportunity.

► **In Pitt County**, educational institutions and economic development leaders are investing together to address needs of both the working population and industries, like the recent collaboration between Eastern Carolina University and Pitt Community College: the Biopharmaceutical Workforce Development and Manufacturing Center

## MADE IN DURHAM

**Made in Durham** is an example of cross-sector collaboration for better alignment of education, employment, and social supports to get better outcomes for youth and young adults. The community partnership unites educators, business, government, nonprofits, youth and young adults in a shared vision that all of Durham's youth will complete high school and a postsecondary credential and begin a rewarding career by the age of 25. With a CEO-led board of directors at the helm and a nimble staffed anchor organization convening partners, Made in Durham partners are linking work and learning more effectively. Seeded and incubated by MDC with business and community leaders, the Made in Durham partnership formed a nonprofit organization, also called Made in Durham, in February 2015 to facilitate the partnership. By strengthening existing initiatives and creating new ones, partners will build an effective education-to-career system that prepares all of Durham's young people for careers and builds a pipeline of local talent that helps regional companies compete and grow. The first action plan—for 2015–2016—includes the following priorities:

**Strategic Leadership:** establishing an effective operating model for community collaboration.

**Data for Decision-making:** tracking young people and their progress on an education-to-career path to inform strategic action, chart progress, and measure success.

**Career Pathways:** constructing a sequence of courses and associated supports that lead to credentials valued in the local labor market.

**Employer Engagement:** engaging employers in the development of a system that supports a robust talent pipeline to meet their labor needs.

**Youth Engagement:** ensuring youth and young adults inform and fully participate in creating and evaluating Durham's education-to-career system.

**Opportunity Youth:** developing a clear sequence of steps by which young people who are behind or disconnected from school or work can complete high school and postsecondary education.

of Excellence. While design is still underway, the center will link education and industry to ensure that residents looking to enter advanced manufacturing in health sciences are trained in the specific skills needed in Pitt County's growing economy, attracting both workers and new industry. *For more about the work in Pitt County, see the community profile on page 84.*

**8** *Seek out local capital to create capacity for collaboration.* Risk-taking and innovation require foundational investment. Philanthropy can be catalytic, testing new ideas, building new institutions, and lowering the cost of social innovation by subsidizing risk. Local philanthropy can take the lead to leverage additional local, state, and federal investment. When philanthropic resources are constrained, other sources for early-stage investment must be considered, perhaps from the business community, state or local government investment, or a mix of “innovation capital,” developed by pooling resources together. Leveraged funds should be used to build the capacity for community-based organizations to collaborate; that may mean providing general operating support and training to create budgets—and even endowments—that move vital helping organizations from survival to sustainability.

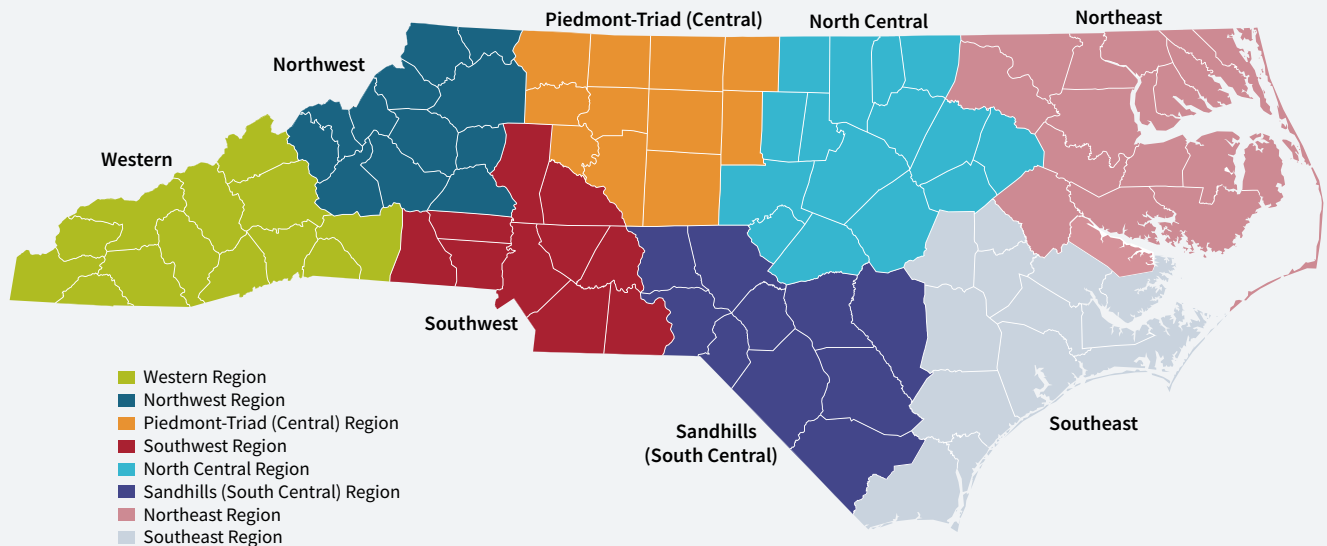
► **In Fayetteville**, a household giving rate above the state average and a community foundation committed to providing training and general operating support buoys local nonprofits.

These philanthropic assets, along with corporate and local workforce agency investments in Fayetteville Technical Community College programs focused on the auto repair industry and military personnel, are examples of good starting points for increasing investment from other sources. *For more about the work in Fayetteville County, see the community profile on page 48.* ■

- 1 The Equality of Opportunity Project. <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/>
- 2 The Equality of Opportunity Project comes from tax records. The study cohort consists of all children in the U.S. born between 1980–82. Those children's income as adults was measured in 2011–12, when they were approximately 30 years old.
- 3 For this report, we are using the term family-supporting wage rather than the minimum wage. While a minimum wage sets an earnings threshold under which our society is not willing to let families slip, it fails to account for the true expenses families incur or for inflationary pressures. Consequently, many working adults will need to supplement their income with public benefits and/or hold multiple jobs in order to afford to feed, clothe, house, and provide medical care for themselves and their families. A family-supporting wage is the hourly rate individuals must earn to support their family, if they are the sole provider. The family-supporting wage calculation assumes an individual is working full time and is adjusted based on the size of the household. The family-supporting wage varies based on the cost of living and taxes where families live and is available for smaller geographies. For a more accurate estimate of the family-supporting wage for a particular geography within North Carolina, please visit the Poverty in America - Living Wage Calculator website at [livingwage.mit.edu](http://livingwage.mit.edu).
- 4 The Equality of Opportunity Project.
- 5 Alan Krueger, a former chair of the president's Council of Economic Advisers
- 6 PolicyLink analysis of IPUMS data
- 7 "Some Interesting Inflation Comparisons Since 1991," Advisor Perspectives, Doug Short, October 2015. <http://www.advisorperspectives.com/dshort/charts/inflation/headline-core-comps.html?College-versus-Medical-Care-or-New-Car-since-1991.gif>
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- 12 "The gains and pains of desegregation," Alex Granados, *EdNC*, November 2015. <https://www.ednc.org/2015/11/23/the-gains-and-pains-of-desegregation/>
- 13 "Tackling Inequality in Gifted-and-Talented Programs," Max Nisen, *The Atlantic*, September 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/inequality-gifted-programs-schools-testing/405013/>
- 14 "Postsecondary Attainment: Differences by Socioeconomic Status," National Center for Education Statistics, May 2015. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_tva.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tva.asp)
- 15 "Umbrellas Don't Make it Rain: Why Studying and Working Hard Isn't Enough for Black Americans," Darrick Hamilton, et al., <http://www.insightcced.org/report-umbrellas-dont-make-it-rain/>
- 16 The Equality of Opportunity Project.
- 17 "More Than 1,400 students Have Earned Associate Degrees Through NC's Reverse-Transfer Program," University of North Carolina, October 2015. <http://www.northcarolina.edu/?q=news/2015/10/more-1400-students-have-earned-associate-degrees-through-ncs-reverse-transfer-program>
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# COMMUNITY PROFILES

## North Carolina Prosperity Zones



If North Carolina is going to build an infrastructure of opportunity, no single, statewide strategy will be sufficient. The systems that can increase mobility for low-income individuals, particularly those efforts that help people find good jobs, need to be developed with a deep understanding of local economic and social conditions.

In the following pages, we take a look at eight different communities—one from each of the state's prosperity zones. (Prosperity zones are a relatively new designation of the North Carolina Department of Commerce to coordinate regional economic and workforce development activities.)

In each community, MDC talked to a variety of individuals and organizations, including government officials, business owners, philanthropic leaders, educational institutions, and community-based nonprofits to get a better understanding of the different ways they are trying to build the infrastructure of opportunity in their region. As you read these profiles we encourage you to look at each community from a systems perspective: how connected are the innovative programs being described and do they come together to create an infrastructure of opportunity?

*The eight communities profiled are:*

**Guilford County:** a county with two large municipalities, a history of manufacturing wins and losses, and a vision for rebuilding the education and workforce system.

**Wilkes County:** a rural county at the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains with a large land area and small population, rallying to restore the economic base after the loss of large manufacturers.

**Fayetteville:** a mid-size city with a large school system, a community college, multiple four-year educational institutions, and a dominant employer: the U.S. military.

**Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren counties:** a rural, four-county region with an intertwined history and economy but limited access to family-supporting work with career potential, depending on proximity to the nearby dynamic metro area.

**Monroe:** a city in one of North Carolina's fastest growing counties—and near the state's largest metro area—with a diverse manufacturing sector and a growing Hispanic population.

**Wilmington:** a coastal city with a strong economy that draws both industry and retirees.

**Western North Carolina:** a region that comprises three rural counties—Jackson, Macon, and Swain—and the Qualla Boundary, where the physical landscape is both asset and challenge to economic development and connection to the rest of the state.

**Pitt County:** a county in North Carolina's Black Belt with strong educational institutions and a rebounding economy poised for more growth in the health science sector.

These communities reflect the wide diversity of the state within the prosperity zones. No one community can be solely representative of the zone in which it is located, but we hope that if you live in rural northeastern North Carolina, the experience of Vance, Granville, Franklin and Warren Counties might be familiar. Or if you live in a large urban center such as Charlotte, the experience of Guilford County will offer valuable lessons. Indeed, no matter where you live, go to school, work, or operate a business, each profile offers important lessons on how communities can come together to create and build systems that connect more individuals to opportunity. ■

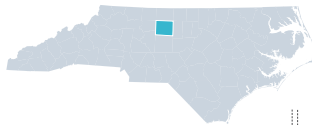


# PARTNERS AT THE SPEED OF TRUST: GUILFORD COUNTY



## THE PLACE:

A county with two large municipalities, a history of manufacturing wins and losses, and a vision for rebuilding the education and workforce system



**THE CHALLENGE:** Sustaining commitment for multiple initiatives and ensuring that those facing the most barriers to opportunity are able to participate in plans for prosperity

**ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE:** The capacity for and habit of collaboration and links to national experts and peer communities

*In the late 1800s, brothers Moses and Cesar Cone built Revolution Mills in Greensboro, N.C., the first flannel mill in the South and a central part of their Guilford County enterprise, the Southern Finishing and Warehouse Company.*

At the height of production, Revolution Mills contained more than 1,000 looms, and by the 1930s was the largest exclusive flannel producer in the world. However, the decline in manufacturing that hit the South in the 1980s also challenged Revolution Mills—the factory closed in 1982. And more than 100 years after it's opening, the mill housed a different sort of revolution: the Nussbaum Center for Entrepreneurship. There are plans for continued invigorating renovations including apartments and artist studios. The story of Revolution Mills is the story of Guilford County: once the home of textiles, now the home of the new knowledge economy; once it brought traditional manufacturing to the area, now

it is bringing entrepreneurship and innovative technologies. High Point and Greensboro, Guilford County's largest municipalities, are each leading efforts to create a workforce that matches the strength of their past and is prepared for the future.

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT: MANUFACTURING PHILANTHROPY

Guilford County, part of the Piedmont-Triad region of North Carolina, is the third largest county by population in North Carolina. If you're driving on I-85 between the state's two most populous counties, Wake and Mecklenburg, Guilford is right in the middle. And if you exit off the interstate in Guilford, you'll immediately notice all the signs for the many colleges and universities there. The oldest college in the county, Guilford College, was founded by the Quakers in 1837 and was followed one year later by Greensboro College. Guilford is also home to two historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), a UNC-system institution, a community college, and other private institutions, including High Point University. More than 40,000 undergraduate students attend college in Guilford County. And knowledge is key to Guilford's economic growth. A 2004 study showed that UNC-Greensboro was worth \$1.22 billion to the region's economy. According to the *Greensboro News & Record*, "that puts it squarely in league with the Moses Cone Health System, Piedmont Triad International Airport and the International Home Furnishings Market in High Point as a driver of the region's economy."<sup>1</sup>

The Cone Brothers were not the only entrepreneurs who found Guilford fruitful for manufacturing. High Point became a boomtown for furniture manufacturing (the "furniture capital of the world") and Greensboro thrived in textiles. Fabric-maker Burlington Industries came to the area in the 1930s and Guilford Mills was founded in 1946. By the 1940s, more than 60 percent of North Carolina's textile and hosiery facilities were located in the Piedmont-Triad region. Other industries also played roles in Guilford's economic history, including insurance services (Jefferson-Pilot) in the early 1900s and aviation (TIMCO and HondaJet) in the 1990s and 2000s.

Manufacturing lives on in Guilford County through its philanthropic legacy. Several business leaders created foundations with their earnings, including Cesar Cone with the Cemala Foundation, Edward Armfield, Sr. with the Armfield Foundation, and James Millis with the

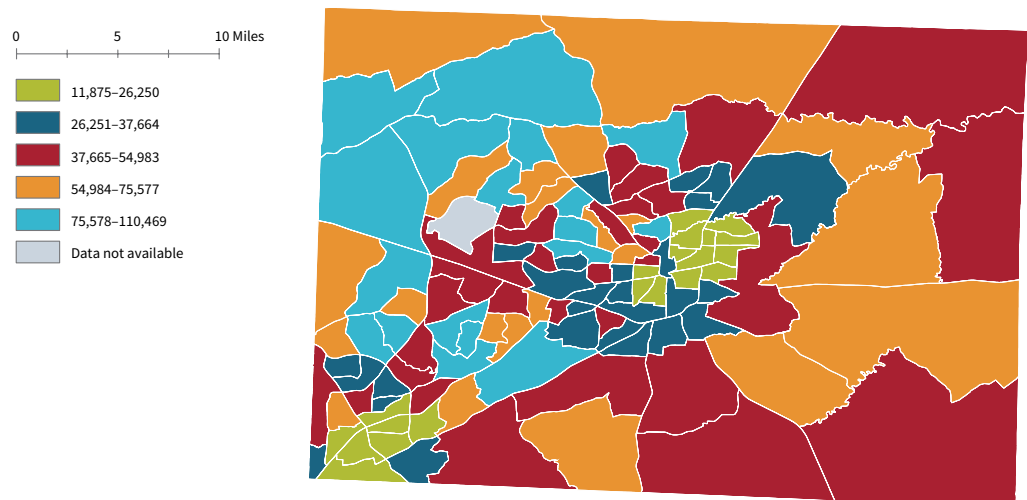
## Manufacturing lives on in Guilford County through its philanthropic legacy.

James H. and Jesse E. Millis Family Foundation. After the decline in manufacturing, these foundations and others invested in their community to keep Guilford County going. Many fund initiatives in Guilford today.

Besides being known for manufacturing, Guilford is also known for its memorable civil rights history. There was a series of nonviolent sit-ins in 1960, starting with the notable "Greensboro Four" sit-in, where four North Carolina A&T State University freshmen sat at Woolworth's all-white lunch counter and refused to leave. That sit-in led to numerous other sit-ins across the state and the South, including in High Point, where 26 high school students also staged a sit-in at their local Woolworth. While Guilford continues to be challenged by racial disparities in education, employment, criminal justice, and other factors, community members celebrate their social justice history with events like the two-week Fabric of Freedom festival and communitywide conversations on race and equality. When discussing partnerships, Guilford residents are quick to point to their Quaker history and Jewish heritage. The narrative is one of inclusion and progressive attitudes, undergirding messages of community empowerment and social justice that resonate today through many of Guilford's collaborative efforts. Indeed, Steve Moore, the executive director of Degrees Matter, calls Guilford the "moral compass" of North Carolina.

In a recent interview, Dr. Harold Martin, president of NC A&T, discussed growing up as a black student in nearby Winston-Salem during the 1950s and 1960s. "I grew up in that window of time when neighborhoods, jobs, and institutions were segregated. All of my experiences growing up were in that segregated experience.

## Guilford County Median Household Income By Census Tract



<sup>1</sup> "UNCG says it's worth \$1.22 billion," Richard M. Barron, the News & Record, August 2006.  
[http://www.greensboro.com/news/business/uncg-says-it-s-worth-billion/article\\_49c4145f-5d66-5d02-8096-3ab5c25a9015.html](http://www.greensboro.com/news/business/uncg-says-it-s-worth-billion/article_49c4145f-5d66-5d02-8096-3ab5c25a9015.html)



Throughout K–12, all of the educational experiences I had were with black teachers who looked at bright students and believed strongly that education was the great equalizer. There was no exception. ‘You are going to college; it was not an option.’ These teachers coupled with parent expectations pushed you towards what they believed were the avenues that would lead to a better life for you.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE: A BROKEN PIPELINE

For so long, Guilford residents did not need higher education to take care of their families. Community members were able to support their families with jobs in factories—jobs that did not require much education. The last of these jobs left at the turn of this century. Between 2001 and 2014, the Greensboro-High Point MSA lost 17,000 jobs, most significantly in production and construction occupations, while the county’s population grew by nearly 20 percent during this same time period. Since 1990, Guilford County has lost 25,000 manufacturing jobs, representing more than a quarter of its total manufacturing job base.<sup>3</sup> Residents with limited education were left with far fewer opportunities for employment. Guilford did not just have a leaky education to career pipeline—the pipeline was broken.

Educators are working hard to make sure all students make it to and *through* Guilford’s postsecondary institutions. But much of classroom success depends on factors outside of the classroom. For years, Guilford ranked in the top five in the nation in the Food Research and Action Center food insecurity rankings. In 2014, it reached number one on that list. Patrice Faison, 2012 North Carolina principal of the year for Oak Hill Elementary School and current principal of Page High School, knows this affects her school: students cannot concentrate in class when they are worried about their next meal. And that’s not the only concern Faison has for her students. Many of her students also deal with unstable housing situations and lack of familial support. Faison says, “I rearranged my budget so that we could afford a full-time social worker to help students and their families work through trying situations.”

## THE STRATEGY: PARTNERS FOR PROGRESS

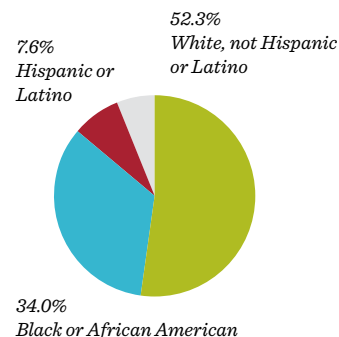
Guilford County community members believe that working in partnership will pull them out of their economic decline. According to Winston McGregor, executive director of the Guilford Education Alliance, when manufacturing and other employers left the area in droves, local governments and organizations “partnered out of necessity.” Cross-sector partners had to align resources because the problem was too big for one institution to solve, and no individual institution had the resources to make progress alone.

In 2011, the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro and the United Way of Greater Greensboro realized they had to make it easier for people to move along the education-to-career continuum. So they created a community taskforce, Greensboro Works, focused on developing a shared vision for the economic success of the community. Greensboro Works recommended leaders work in partnership to address three community concerns: workforce

## Piedmont Triad: Guilford County

Population (2014, est)	512,119
Population growth (2010–2014)	4.9%

Job growth (2010–2014)	1.2%
Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.)	10.2%
Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.)	58%
Unemployment rate, 2014	10.1%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

training, postsecondary degree completion, and family economic success. (Even though the taskforce is called Greensboro Works, many of the efforts reach the entire Guilford County community.) According to Tara Sandercock, senior vice president for the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, “The taskforce decided the most strategic way to address those three issues is to invest in research and development to align Guilford with national initiatives, joining learning networks, and leveraging national funding to support these efforts (Lumina Foundation, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Walmart Foundation, and others) with other communities also trying to rebuild and grow their workforces.”

### Addressing Poverty

The United Way of Greater Greensboro realized that poverty rates were moving in the wrong direction and wanted to understand the root cause. They identified six critical populations who face the most severe headwinds in their community: female heads of household, families with young children, men and boys of color, immigrants, seniors, and veterans. They found significant intergenerational poverty, both systemic and institutional, among these populations. In 2015, after spending two years researching best practices and using Annie E. Casey Foundation and Aspen Institute Family Economic Assessment frameworks to identify strengths, challenges, gaps, and opportunities for Guilford families’ economic success, the United Way and 18 partners, established the Family Success Center, a place-based, integrated response aimed at lifting families out of poverty. Michelle Gethers-Clark, the president and CEO of the United Way of Greater Greensboro, explained the meaning behind the Family Success Center name:

- **Family:** the nucleus of the community
- **Success:** center participants are successful
- **Center:** a place for the community to go

Currently, the program is serving more than 100 families. They are paired with success coaches who develop customized goals for

<sup>2</sup> “Leading NC A&T, A Top HBCU In The Country,” Will Michaels and Frank Stasio, WUNC, December 2015. <http://wunc.org/post/leading-nc-top-hbcu-country>

<sup>3</sup> “A New Model for Economic Development: The Guilford County Economic Development Strategy,” Rob Bencini. <http://robbencini.com/economic-development/a-new-model-for-economic-development-the-guilford-county-economic-development-strategy>

each family member. When families meet defined milestones, they receive incentives, such as deposits in college savings accounts. “Family participants will be accountable for their success that leads to financial independence,” says Gethers-Clark. “When people feel successful, the community is successful.”

### *Saying Yes to Education*

Maurice “Mo” Green, former superintendent of Guilford County Schools and now Executive Director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, says, “I want to create a new normal for higher education expectations in my community—one where everyone sees college as the next step.” But first, students must make it to high school graduation. The school district has several initiatives to assist students in getting there, many specifically designed for first-generation and at-risk students. Many of these interventions put students in defined cohorts with graduation coaches, early colleges, middle colleges, and specialized academies. The hard work is paying off; this past school year the district nearly had a 90 percent graduation rate. But the district is looking at other metrics besides graduation to ensure students are ready for that next step. The district aims for success in ACT, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate testing, dual enrollment passage rates, the number of students who complete career certifications while in high school, and the number of graduates who meet the minimum entry requirements for the UNC system. Green believes they can increase success in all of these metrics, but finding the necessary resources is a struggle. He determined that the number one question facing policy leaders in North Carolina is, “Are you going to fund the education system adequately to get the results we need?”

*Green determined that the number one question facing policy leaders in North Carolina is, “Are you going to fund the education system adequately to get the results we need?”*

Securing those resources is seen as a community concern in Guilford. Dr. Franklin Gilliam, chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), talks about the “shared fate” of the university and the community: “When UNCG succeeds, the community succeeds; and when the community succeeds, UNCG succeeds.” Others in the community believe this, too. In 2002, the High Point Community Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, and the Cemala Foundation joined forces to create the Guilford Education Alliance (GEA). GEA, with the tagline “educational success is a community responsibility,” serves as a fundraiser, an advocate, and a backbone organization for several educational efforts across the community. So when Guilford decided to begin conversations about joining Say Yes to Education, the infrastructure already was in place.

In 2013, GEA, the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, the High Point Community Foundation, and Guilford County Schools first explored bringing national initiative “Say Yes to Education” to

What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Greensboro Commuting Zone** (Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Guilford, Randolph, Rockingham)

Lowest quintile	39%
Lower Middle Quintile	30%
Middle Quintile	16%
Upper Middle Quintile	9%
Highest Quintile	5%

Guilford, thus beginning a period of research and fundraising. After a year and a half of hard work, Guilford was selected as a Say Yes to Education community in September 2015. Say Yes galvanizes communities around three main goals. First, Say Yes helps communities build local endowments that provide last-dollar tuition scholarships so public school graduates can afford and complete a postsecondary education. Second, Say Yes works with the community to build student support that help students every step of the way toward completion of a postsecondary degree. Third, Say Yes works with school leadership to ensure students are on the path to academic success.

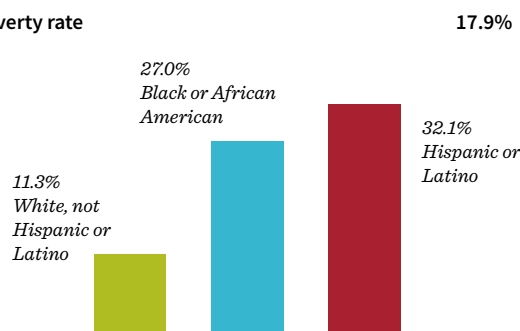
To fund the local endowment and demonstrate capacity to implement a Say Yes partnership, Say Yes challenged Guilford to raise \$28 million in commitments. Guilford residents exceeded that goal by raising \$32.5 million by launch. That total has since grown to \$34.5 million. They have set a goal of \$70 million for the endowment. “The whole effort is what we call innovative disruption,” says McGregor. “We’re building new systems, targeting investments, and looking differently at how we can align a variety of resources in our community to ensure success for students. This will benefit students, families, and our entire community for generations to come.”

Say Yes tuition scholarships work in different ways. All Guilford County high school graduates regardless of income are eligible for last-dollar tuition scholarships for in-state public colleges and universities (including one-, two-, and four-year degree and certificate programs). There are also more than 100 private colleges and universities that offer last-dollar tuition guarantees for students with household incomes at approximately \$75,000 or less. For students above the income cap, the local endowment provides up to \$5,000 to help offset cost of tuition.

Say Yes is a commitment to all Guilford high school graduates that they will have tuition assistance, but it is more than dollars for college. The program provides wraparound services (e.g., mental

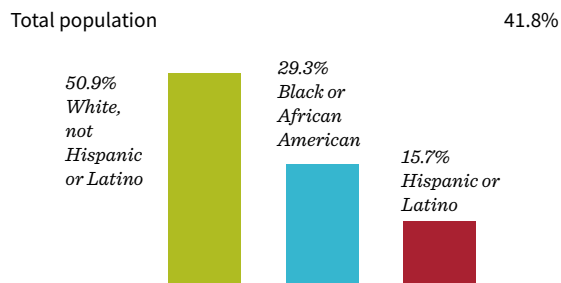
## Equity Indicators: Guilford County

### Poverty rate



Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.41 (\$44,525)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	30%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$51,293

### Postsecondary educational attainment (25+), 2014



### Median household income

Population	\$45,050
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$57,263
Black or African American	\$38,732
Hispanic or Latino	\$39,764

health counseling, tutoring, and afterschool programs) for students, starting in elementary school, to expand children's individual college-going aspirations and see college as a place where they belong. McGregor explains that Say Yes provides a wide, research-based *path* for all students, *pushes* students along the path with support services, and *pulls* students over the finish line with the promise of the scholarship. With Say Yes, everyone is accountable to the same success goal: postsecondary credentials that lead to family-sustaining employment, aiming for the new normal Mo Green hopes for his community.

Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) is part of another national initiative, "Completion by Design," a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiative that works with community colleges to increase completion for low-income students before age 26. GTCC administrators believe Say Yes fits nicely with Completion by Design. The intrusive advising offered through Say Yes will help educators find out what students' challenges are and offer support to face those challenges. Ed Bowling, executive director of Completion by Design, says, "This should reduce the number of developmental education students [those who need remedial course work] because they will be more college-ready."

Say Yes builds on the Greensboro Works strategy of joining national learning communities, including another Guilford initiative, Degrees Matter. Focusing on community members who started college but did not complete, Degrees Matter is a Lumina Foundation-funded initiative, in partnership with the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Guilford County's seven other institutions of higher education. In addition to Guilford County, Lumina funded 19 other communities in The Graduate Network focused on adult college completion. Lumina also asked Degrees Matter to join the Community Partnerships for Attainment initiative, an effort to deepen the impact of





cross-sector, place-based strategies to increase higher education attainment. Steve Moore, executive director of Degrees Matter, says that receiving funding from Lumina provided credibility for their work and helped them secure funding from other foundations like the John M. Belk Endowment. With an intentional focus on immigrants, men of color, veterans, and single moms, leaders of Degrees Matter talk about the importance of FIT—finances, institutional support, time—when matching students with the right college. They already work with some local businesses, including Bank of America and Cone Health, and they plan to scale up these efforts and connect to other employers, like the City of Greensboro. Moore says that studies have shown that local employers receive a \$1.40 return on every dollar invested in college tuition reimbursement.

### *Connections to Employers*

Like Greensboro Works, Guilford County looked to national models to find an answer for business growth. Opportunity Greensboro, with leaders from businesses, foundations, and higher education institutions, developed the Union Square Campus for healthcare professions, sparked by a Spokane, WA center. An effort to keep local college students in the county follows Campus Philly, a similar program to improve economic development and college student retention rates. Opportunity Greensboro members believe this national model will “transform Greensboro’s wealth of educational assets into economic success.”<sup>4</sup> UNCG, NC A&T, GTCC and Cone Health will share programming, lab space and equipment, resulting in considerable cost savings. Leaders hope this will stimulate further economic development in the Union Square area. They think this partnership strategy can be replicated in other industries across the county and throughout the state.

“Good jobs with benefits would eliminate the need for United

Way services. And that’s a good thing,” says Bobby Smith, executive director of the United Way of Greater High Point. Many community leaders are working to bring those good jobs to Guilford. The Greensboro Works recommendations include making the community a National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS) site to develop a sector-based partnership to support innovative approaches to workforce demands. The Triad Workforce Solutions Collaborative is the realization of those recommendations. Donna Newton, executive director for the Collaborative, describes the effort as “a loose, organic group of business leaders, educational institutions and support organizations interested in Guilford workforce development.” Newton says the biggest benefits to being an NFWS site are the opportunities to apply for exclusive grants and to learn from other communities. In the past two years, the Collaborative has: developed a youth apprenticeship program; received a Social Innovation Fund grant from NFWS to work with local career centers to help people obtain manufacturing certificates and employment; worked with Walmart on building the supply chain management workforce; and now is attempting to reinvigorate career and technical education programs in partnership with local employers.

Individual students also see a return on investment in education-employer connections. GTCC is using industry data to review its programs and develop stackable credential pathways for students. Advisors help students see that getting an associate’s degree is not just a two-year process but a series of milestones with credentials and degrees before and beyond the associate’s. GTCC is creating these pathways in areas of high-demand for skilled workers. The college recently received a United States Department of Labor grant to help displaced, socioeconomically challenged workers obtain jobs in the aviation industry. Most of these students are employed upon completion of the program.

<sup>4</sup>“Union Square Campus,” Greensboro Partnership. <http://greensboropartnership.com/action-greensboro/center-city/union-square-campus>



## Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024

*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$21.41*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
29-1141	Registered Nurses	4,760	5,388	628	13%	\$30.22	Associate's degree
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	3,838	4,372	534	14%	\$30.66	Doctoral or professional degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	3,866	4,189	323	8%	\$56.83	Bachelor's degree
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	1,621	1,896	275	17%	\$23.80	High school diploma or equivalent
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	3,274	3,546	272	8%	\$24.61	High school diploma or equivalent
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	2,452	2,723	271	11%	\$31.31	Bachelor's degree
15-1151	Computer User Support Specialists	1,445	1,664	219	15%	\$22.08	Some college, no degree
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	1,190	1,399	209	18%	\$26.45	Bachelor's degree
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	818	1,002	184	22%	\$29.85	Bachelor's degree
13-1111	Management Analysts	1,145	1,319	174	15%	\$30.23	Bachelor's degree

### Economic Vision

The goal of Greensboro Works is to create a shared vision for the economic success of the community. In November 2015, the county took a huge step in developing that vision. The Guilford County Board of Commissioners, Greensboro City Council, and High Point City Council passed a resolution to create the Guilford County Economic Development Alliance (GCEDA). Leaders hope this new entity will usher in a culture of cooperation among the cities and the county in economic recruitment efforts. The Alliance will serve under a leadership board and also will have a Business Advisory Council with 12 members, including the chair of the Workforce Development Board and the president of GTCC. According to High Point Mayor Bill Bencini, “We’ve learned how to develop trust between the three jurisdictions. This partnership is about getting to the point where we could develop a model to institutionalize cooperation between all three of us.”<sup>5</sup>

### NEXT STEPS: CONTINUOUS LEARNING—TOGETHER

While several communities affected by the 1980s and '90s decline in manufacturing are still trying to figure out their comeback, Guilford County has taken several steps up the staircase to economic success. Through philanthropic and private investments, the Guilford County community has succeeded in having Greensboro Works join national learning communities. This strategy is helping the county move toward system-level change through sustainable partnerships, community commitment to educational

and economic success, and data-driven decision-making.

But this success leads to even more questions. As the energy from and hope for Say Yes continues to build in Guilford, community leaders are concerned about how to keep the momentum going for other community initiatives. They want to understand how to help economically disadvantaged, at-risk students see that this \$70 million endowment is for them and not just for the middle-income students on the other side of town. The community also must grapple with how to keep Say Yes recipients in Guilford for college or get them to return after college graduation by providing them with attractive employment options. And with two large cities in one county, they must ensure that both Greensboro and High Point are continuing to move in the same forward direction: providing much needed family-sustaining jobs for community members. It's hard to determine what success will look like for the new GCEDA, but Mark Sutter from the Triad Business Journal believes “a win for them would be to look back and say ‘we were able to put our best foot forward’ and weren’t fighting over [a business prospect] and that they had a unified approach. I think there’s a lot of faith that a unified approach will bring the best results.”<sup>6</sup>

Guilford County is moving toward a vision that diminishes the effects of poverty and exclusion, so the community can enjoy the health and prosperity gained when everyone’s success matters. In robust partnerships with education leaders, community leaders, employers, and their neighbors, they are moving in this direction. But it will take time. As the Rev. Odell Cleveland, chief administrative officer for Mount Zion Baptist Church in Greensboro says, “Partnerships are built at the speed of trust.”

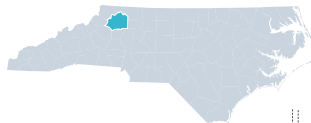
<sup>5</sup> “News Release: Three Local Governments Agree To Formation Of New Guilford County Economic Development Alliance,” City of Greensboro, November 2015. <http://www.greensboro101.com/2015/11/news-release-three-local-governments-agree-to-formation-of-new-guilford-county-economic-development-alliance>; <sup>6</sup> “Economic Development Group Puts Guilford County Under One Umbrella,” Emily McCord, WFDD, November 2015. <http://www.wfdd.org/story/economic-development-group-puts-guilford-county-under-one-umbrella>

# RECOVERY THROUGH COLLABORATION: WILKES COUNTY



## THE PLACE:

A rural county at the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains with a large land area and small population, rallying to restore the economic base after the loss of large manufacturers



**THE CHALLENGE:** Creating local education and employment opportunities that can lift families from intergenerational poverty and involve a broad spectrum of the community in designing those opportunities

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Foundational partnerships among local government, secondary, and postsecondary education institutions, and employers with support from regional philanthropy

*You can't talk about Wilkes County without talking about its long history of entrepreneurship. From a modest hardware store in North Wilkesboro grew Lowe's, one of the largest home improvement chains in the country.*

Any fan of 1970s ACC basketball remembers the Holly Farms Chicken Player of the Game, but may not have known that every time that UNC's own Phil Ford received that award it was from a Wilkesboro-based company. And of course, driving into the county on the Junior Johnson Highway is a reminder that entrepreneurship in the form of moonshine running and stock car racing is part of the county's history as well.

The legacy of these and other businesses in Wilkes County is just that: a legacy. In 2003, Lowe's took its headquarters to the big city, or at least to the booming Charlotte suburb of Mooresville. Holly Farms was taken over by Arkansas-based



Tyson Foods back in 1989. And the only tangible reminder of Junior Johnson and his racing friends left in the county is the hulk of an abandoned speedway sitting just off Highway 421.

So what does a community do when its economic base is stripped? What do you do in the face of declining population and massive job loss?

“It hurt our pride, especially when you see the racetrack sitting over in North Wilkesboro deteriorating. It was a similar feeling when Lowe’s left,” Linda Cheek, the president of the Wilkes Chamber of Commerce says. “But you have to hitch up your pants and say, ‘Let’s go.’”

#### HISTORY AND CONTEXT: WE BUILT IT HERE

Wilkes County lies just on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a rural county with two towns that share a name, Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro, sitting in the middle and serving as the county’s economic hub. The towns used to be considered rivals—political differences and games under the Friday Night Lights meant that saying you were from one side of the Yadkin River or the other meant a great deal. Today, unless you are checking your GPS, it would be hard to tell when you left Wilkesboro and headed into North. But the county is more than the twin towns. It is spread out across 757 square miles, meaning the county ranks 13th in North Carolina in terms of area; only about 12 percent of the population lives in one of the Wilkesboros.

Wilkes Community College, headquartered in Wilkesboro, is

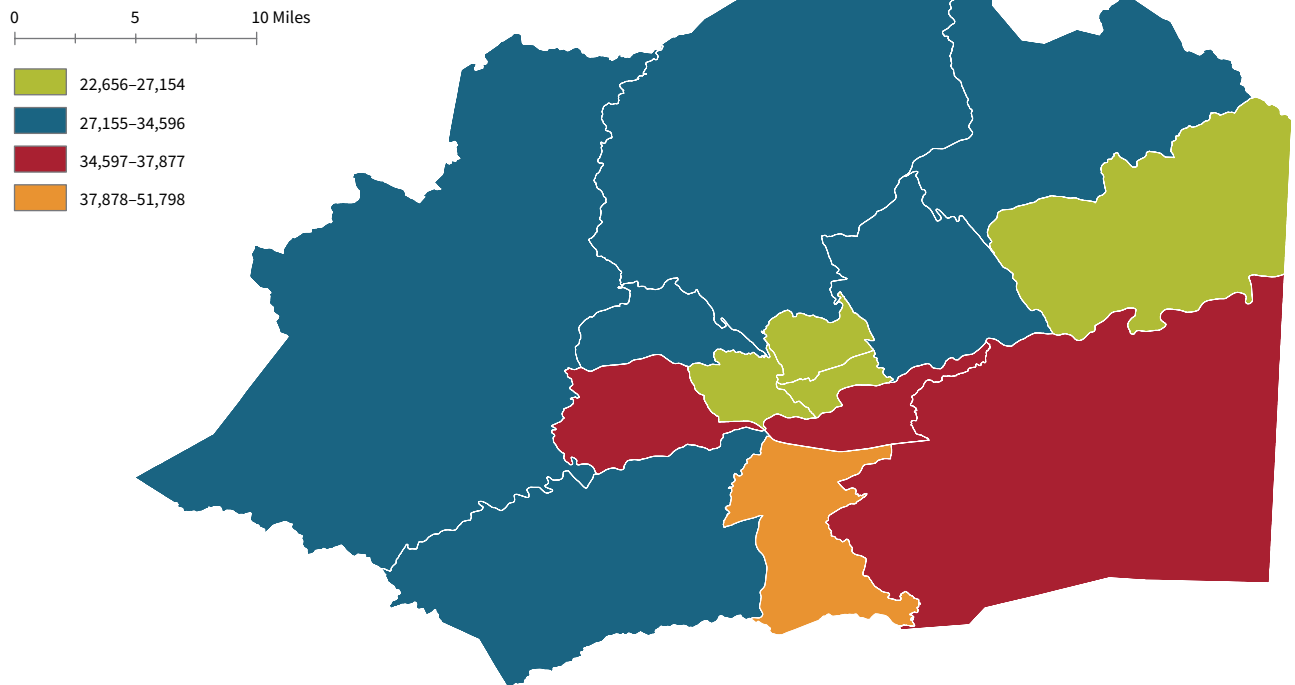
the sole postsecondary institution serving about 11,000 credit and continuing education students, with satellite campuses in the adjoining counties of Ashe and Alleghany. The Wilkes County schools have five high schools and serve more than 10,000 students district-wide on an annual basis. Educational attainment is lower than the state average with only 22 percent of the county’s population over the age of 25 having attended at least some college compared to 38 percent statewide.

*“At one time, if we needed it in Wilkes, we built it here,” says Hardin Kennedy, chairman of transportation technology at Wilkes Community College and a member of the Wilkes County school board.*

The economy of Wilkes has undergone a dramatic shift over the last 10 years, suffering some of the most dramatic job losses in the state. Between 2005 and 2015, Wilkes lost nearly 5,000 jobs, or 17 percent of all jobs in the county. To put that decline in perspective, statewide jobs grew by 7.3 percent in that same time period, a more than 24 percent difference. The job losses came from a variety of sectors. The departure of Lowe’s headquarters meant the loss of a significant number of professional jobs from the county, while



## Wilkes County Median Household Income



the collapse of the state's furniture and textiles industries had a devastating impact on the critical manufacturing sector.

"At one time, if we needed it in Wilkes, we built it here," says Hardin Kennedy, Chairman of Transportation Technology at Wilkes Community College and a member of the Wilkes County School Board.

The history of manufacturing closure has not just been felt in the loss of jobs; it has resulted in an erosion of trust that manufacturing is a viable path forward for young people.

"There is a stigma of manufacturing closings in this county," says Adrian Tait, who directs the High Country Workforce Development Board. "People say, 'You don't want to go into that industry because you'll get laid off.' People aren't aware that manufacturing has changed."

So while traditional manufacturing like the Tyson Foods processing plant in Wilkesboro (the largest private employer in the county) remains, newer, cleaner, technology-based manufacturing firms are also operating in the county. Even though the large textile mills might be gone, specialized fiber firms still operate, but in a much different way than before.

"Manufacturing is not the dirty, backbreaking work it used to be," says Jeff Cox, president of Wilkes Community College.

The presence of these new manufacturing firms—some of which were started by former employees of those large companies that closed operations—is a testament that manufacturing is among the best options for young people and those who may have been dislocated from the workforce. In fact, the sector still comprises more than 18 percent of the county's workforce and pays about

8 percent higher wages than the average private industry job in Wilkes County.<sup>1</sup>

### THE CHALLENGE: THE OTHER 86 PERCENT

Indeed, connecting workers to this new economy is one of the significant and pressing challenges the county faces: how do you make sure the county has the workforce to grow the economy? How do you fill the skills gap to ensure that the prospect of economic growth—be it in manufacturing or in other sectors—is met? The county faces issues similar to those in the rest of rural North Carolina, especially regarding economic mobility. These regions must ensure that efforts aimed at providing good, home-grown opportunities for the county's best and brightest reach all segments of the population. Rural communities want those opportunities to appeal to young people who leave to pursue an education so they'll come back to pursue their chosen professions.

"I have a huge concern for people who just have a high school diploma," says Mark Byrd, interim superintendent of Wilkes County Schools. "Fifteen years ago there were jobs for those individuals at factories and they could have a successful life. There are so few of those jobs available now."

Hardin Kennedy, chair of transportation technologies at Wilkes Community College, puts an even finer point on it. "We have a top education for the top 14 percent of the county, but what about the other 86 percent?"

There are vexing barriers that impede mobility for these 86

<sup>1</sup> "Wilkes County Profile," ACCESSNC, North Carolina Department of Commerce. <http://accessnc.commerce.state.nc.us/docs/countyProfile/NC/37193.pdf>

What are the chances a child raised in the **lowest quintile** of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

### North Wilkesboro Commuting Zone (Ashe, Wilkes)

Lowest quintile	38%
Lower Middle Quintile	26%
Middle Quintile	18%
Upper Middle Quintile	13%
Highest Quintile	5%

percenters. These include intergenerational poverty, lack of public transportation, the cost of internet access (which is increasingly needed to find jobs and meet educational requirements), and a deadly drug problem. Wilkes County has had consistently the largest number of methamphetamine labs in the state; 50 labs were raided in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Employers frequently comment on the inability to hire workers due to drug test failure, making the cost of illegal drugs stretch beyond the personal to one with widespread economic impact.

"We see hopelessness among a lot of parents," says Donna Cotton, director of secondary education at Wilkes County Schools. "Parents can't see past a job at Tyson for their kids and even a job at a call center might be beyond their reach because it requires having nice clothes. We need to show kids there's something else out there."

## THE STRATEGY: WORKING TOGETHER

As the region wrestles with these multiple challenges, it has embraced the idea of cooperative and collective solutions. Indeed, while the entrepreneurial spirit may have been the defining characteristic of Wilkes County in the 20th century, the first part of the 21st century is about working together to develop systemic strategies to connect more people to the education-to-career continuum. That means bringing business and industry to the conversation, but it also means public schools, the community college, and local governments have had to take action to promote effective policy efforts. Most of these efforts have focused on preparing a new workforce to both attract new businesses to the county and support new entrepreneurial ventures.

In some ways, the example for collaboration came from the closer relationship between North Wilkesboro and Wilkesboro. The towns share equipment on a regular basis and even have joint council meetings several times a year, an unheard of practice just a few years ago.

"We know we've got to work together to move forward," says

## Northwest: Wilkes County

Population (2014, est.) **68,838**

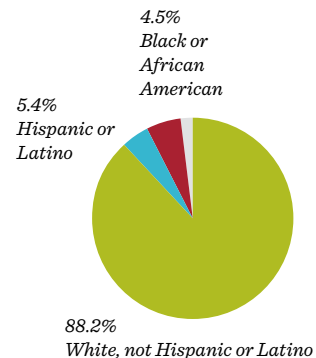
Population growth (2010–2014) -0.7%

Job growth (2010–2014) -16.7%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) -3.8%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 46.5%

Unemployment rate, 2014 14.5%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

Wilkes County Manager John Yates. "We'll go backward if we don't."

That spirit of collaboration extends to a renewed focus on getting the business community involved in worker training. The community college, Economic Development Council, and school system created the Business Industrial and Educational Forum (BIEF) to explicitly explore how to produce better qualified employees for local industry. While these industry councils by themselves are not uniquely innovative, having industry look at systematic strategies with people from postsecondary and the K–12 system is a breakthrough for Wilkes.

BIEF's efforts have led to some innovative programs, including a teaching externship. In this program, teachers from the county's five high schools are paid a stipend to spend a day with a local employer to learn about what the company does and what technical and workplace skills are necessary for the industry.

The collaboration modeled in BIEF is apparent between the local schools and Wilkes Community College. An example of the deep partnership is the new Project ADMIT (Advance Development in Manufacturing and Technology) which expands STEM-related instruction and opportunities for high school students. Project ADMIT will construct facilities at local high schools to accommodate the equipment and technologies to give students the training they need to be matched with employers in the region. Instructors for the program will include, at least initially, those from the community college until the school system can bring on full-time instructors at each of the high schools. Students who participate in these expanded career education programs can receive college credit, giving them a leg up as they pursue a postsecondary credential. The effort is funded through a variety of philanthropic sources such as Golden LEAF, government sources such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, as well as contributions from Wilkes County businesses.

President Cox sees programs like Project ADMIT as the solution to the critical economic challenge facing the region: growing or attracting businesses in a county where, traditionally, educational expectations have been lower. "It's a bit of a chicken and egg scenario," he says. "If we want to attract high-wage manufacturing

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Department of Justice

*The spirit of collaboration extends to a renewed focus on getting the business community involved in worker training... While industry councils by themselves are not uniquely innovative, having industry look at systematic strategies with people from postsecondary and the K-12 system is a breakthrough for Wilkes.*

we need a high-skilled workforce, but there aren't necessarily those jobs here yet to encourage students to pursue these programs. To sustain these programs, we have to keep students coming in. We can't build a program for two students a year."

Much of the Project ADMIT focus is on preparing a new workforce rather than addressing the needs of incumbent or dislocated workers.

Marty Hemric, who retired as school superintendent in the fall of 2015, agrees that the challenge is making the connection between education and employment. "There is the real perception that we are educating people to leave—it's not an accurate one, but a real one," he says. "What we are doing is changing the mindset to get kids into more curriculum pathways by working with Wilkes Community College and local businesses, to give students awareness of the opportunities that are out there [in our community]."

Again, Hemric and others point to the collaboration with the college and businesses as a key to developing the programs. New programs like Project ADMIT developed through frequent conversations between the institutions in a variety of settings; they are not one-off programs created by a committee working in a silo.

"It is important to have cross-enrollment of entities and individuals on local boards," Hemric says pointing to BIEF, the EDC, and the

local hospital boards as examples where individuals can have conversations relating to local workforce challenges. "These shared conversations are critical."

Indeed, Hemric says that one reason Project ADMIT received funding was that it was not seen as a school project but as a community-wide effort.

Though the relationship between local community colleges and K-12 systems is sometimes difficult, that is the not the case in Wilkes. "It's not my students or your students; we're looking at all students as our students," Superintendent Byrd says. "We've done an unbelievable job of eliminating that notion in Wilkes County."

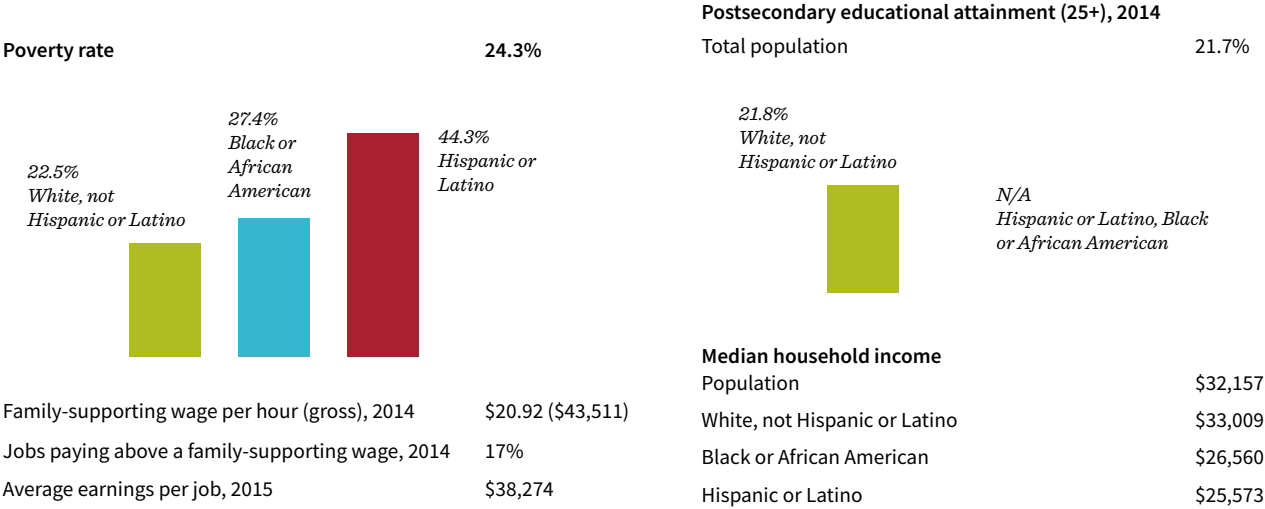
Another example of the collaboration comes from the active participation of local philanthropy, which has its roots in the economic history of the region. Several prominent families associated with Lowe's stayed in the county even after the company moved its headquarters and have contributed to efforts aimed at increasing the economic vitality of the region. For instance, the Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation recently gave substantial funding to open a new health science building at Wilkes Community College. At the building's dedication, it was clear that the foundation sees the college preparing people for work in the health care industry as critical to encouraging economic mobility.

"We live in a low-income area with too many people in poverty," said Lee Herring, representing the family. "The only dependable way out of that circumstance is an education leading to a job paying a family-supporting wage. With a two-year degree earned in this building, you are giving them an opportunity for a better life, to have a higher standard of living than their parents, and the means to support a family."<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> "Herring Hall Dedicated" *Wilkes Journal Patriot*, September 4, 2015

Equity Indicators: Wilkes County



Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024

Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$20.92

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
21-1023	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	65	75	10	15%	\$21.76	Bachelor's degree
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	51	58	7	14%	\$27.82	Bachelor's degree
21-1014	Mental Health Counselors	21	28	7	33%	\$23.39	Master's degree
21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	71	77	6	8%	\$21.11	Bachelor's degree
29-1051	Pharmacists	36	41	5	14%	\$61.91	Doctoral or professional degree
11-9151	Social and Community Service Managers	24	28	4	17%	\$31.62	Bachelor's degree
15-1121	Computer Systems Analysts	29	33	4	14%	\$28.02	Bachelor's degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	249	252	3	1%	\$42.57	Bachelor's degree
11-2021	Marketing Managers	12	15	3	25%	\$55.87	Bachelor's degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	84	87	3	4%	\$22.64	High school diploma or equivalent

## NEXT STEPS: WE KEEP GOING

There is much underway in Wilkes County aimed at preparing individuals for work that can pay beyond a family-supporting wage. In addition to Project ADMIT plans, there are efforts to introduce more STEM courses into the middle school and high school curriculum and a program called Skills USA that allows school-age competitors from Wilkes County to compete and win national competitions on a variety of technical skills. All these efforts share the common commitment to collaboration and their current and projected success reflects that spirit.

But the community recognizes that there is a lot of work left to do. And it also recognizes that its programs may not be reaching the most difficult to reach—the persistently poor. If, as Kennedy at Wilkes Community College asserts, the county is already doing well on reaching the top 14 percent of students, the programs where the county is placing its next bets focus more on the next 30–40 percent of students, those who have shown some academic promise. These academically oriented programs are geared to identify students who may have an interest or aptitude for technical careers, but who have not yet had the chance to explore these opportunities. There are not as many programmatic efforts geared toward the bottom 20 percent or, perhaps just as concerning, on those who have lost their jobs and are now disconnected from employment. Projects to meet the needs of the most low-income residents are primarily through the United Way's efforts at crisis management and relief, rather than addressing systemic causes of poverty.

Most of the collaborative efforts have focused on the future workforce rather than on retraining workers who may either be working in non-family-supporting jobs or have been disconnected from the workforce. Certainly, many of these individuals can re-enter the education pipeline through Wilkes Community College, but the emphasis again is on finding a path for young people to enter the workforce.

And perhaps the focus on collaboration and cross-pollination of boards and committees has created another kind of silo when it comes to determining where the county's emphasis should be. Groups such as BIEF that have been so instrumental don't include active representation from low-income communities. It is not clear where the voice of those below the poverty line can be heard in making

critical decisions for the community. Wilkes, of course, is not alone in this, but as the community seeks ways to lift people out of often dire economic circumstances, it may look for ways to encourage active participation from those not always included in shaping the community's future.

Certainly the collective will to enact change in the face of trying circumstances is here. As Allison Phillips, executive director of the Wilkes Community College Endowment Corporation, puts it: "We keep going here. We get around our obstacles."



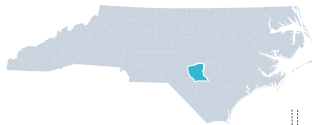


# FINDING A WAY TO THRIVE TOGETHER: FAYETTEVILLE



## THE PLACE:

A mid-size city with a large school system, a community college, multiple four-year educational institutions, and a dominant employer: the U.S. military



**THE CHALLENGE:** Stagnant mobility for young people born in the city, and supporting veterans' successful transition into the civilian workforce

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Educational institutions with military and employer links, and local philanthropy committed to building capacity of community-based organizations

*The Fayetteville Symphony Orchestra is tuning for a midday concert. There is, perhaps, a bit more shushing and seat-kicking in the audience than usual; they are preparing for their annual performance of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf," the perfect, delightful fare for an audience of 4,500 third-graders from Cumberland County Schools.*

The Yanoff Arts Initiative, named in honor of the donors who established the supporting endowment at the Cumberland Community Foundation, has been offered for more than a decade and is a joint effort of Communities in Schools, Cumberland County Schools, Fayetteville Symphony Orchestra and the Foundation. The program includes an

in-class curriculum and visits—with a chance to see instruments up close and take a turn playing them—for youngsters at several elementary schools. As these students sit in the dark hall, waiting for the trip-trip of the cat's clarinet, they're not thinking about a day 10 years from now, when they'll be nearly finished with high school and examining their options after graduation. They aren't thinking about their parents' current jobs and whether there is enough income to offer help with higher education, or enough to make a career move, buy a house, or give back to organizations like the Fayetteville Symphony that provide arts and other enriching activities in the community.

But there are people in Fayetteville who are trying to make a clear path for these young symphony-goers, trying to support education and retraining for others in the community, and to increase employment opportunities to make Fayetteville a place where individuals can thrive and come home to, like Peter drawn back to the warm cabin.

Not everyone in Fayetteville is currently thriving. Recent research from the Equality of Opportunity project shows that the city has a “place penalty” of almost negative 18 percent—the lowest figure in a study of the 100 largest commuting zones in the country.<sup>1</sup> That means, no matter where he or she ends up as an adult, a child born in Fayetteville will earn significantly less than she would have otherwise, had she been born somewhere else. Addressing these issues requires individual commitment to working together because it takes both personal determination and strong, equitable systems to make economic mobility possible for a larger portion of the community.

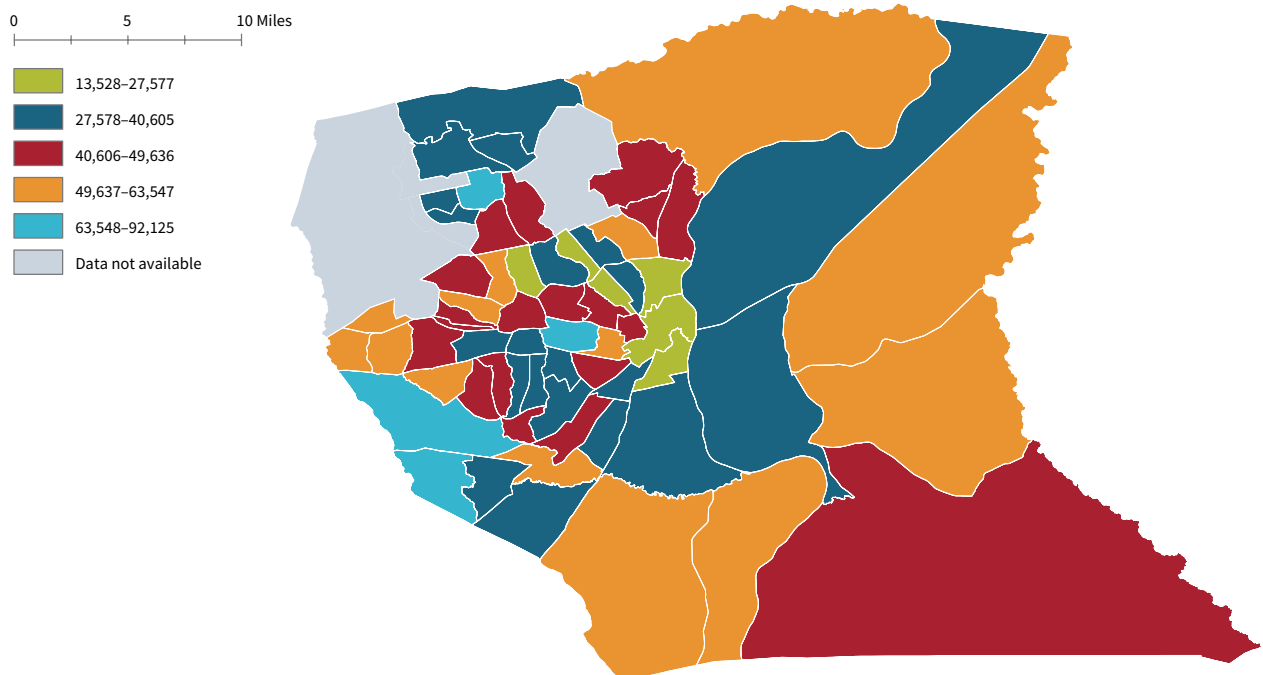
## HISTORY AND CONTEXT: RIVER PORT, CROSSROAD, MILITARY INSTALLATION

Fayetteville has a population of almost 204,000. The city is approximately 41 percent white and 42 percent black; about 10 percent of today's population is Latino. While the proportion of individuals with a postsecondary degree is similar across racial groups, there is significant disparity in median household income across these groups, a paradox that raises questions about whether these degrees are concentrated in one sector or if there are sufficient options to deploy that education in Fayetteville.

Nearly 30 percent of the labor force commutes outside of Cumberland County for work (most to Wake County), and nearly 30 percent works within the city of Fayetteville. Almost 8 percent of the labor force is unemployed—higher than the state average and higher than the 2004 pre-recession level of 5 percent.

Labor and commodities have been moving in and out of Fayetteville since its founding. It began as a river port and continued to serve as a commerce center for the Cape Fear Valley after the railroad was built in the 1890s. Most of that commerce was in forestry and textile products. The area's military history began with a federal arsenal built in the 1800s (and later destroyed during General Sherman's march). The U.S. Army installation at Fort Bragg, as well as Pope Air Field, were completed in 1919, just as World War I got underway. Fort Bragg was then a big part of the federal defense expansion during World War II; by October 1940, the base population exceeded that of Fayetteville.<sup>2</sup> That expansion was the beginning of the Fayetteville of today; as Fayetteville Observer

## Cumberland County Median Household Income



<sup>1</sup> Equality of Opportunity Project;

<sup>2</sup> *Cumberland County: A Brief History*, Roy Parker, Jr. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History. 1990.



*“You think the military is everything, but it’s not everything,” says Jim Lott, director of the Cumberland County Office of Workforce Development, insisting that Fort Bragg obviously can’t be ignored, but there are many other factors that contribute to who can thrive in the city.*

Publisher Charles Broadwell calls it “a Southern town surrounded by the nation’s largest military installation.” In other words, in many ways, Fayetteville is like many other mid-size Southern cities: it has a history of segregation, of civil rights era actions to undo Jim Crow (including lunch counter sit-ins led by students from Fayetteville State University), of the eventual desegregation of public schools in the 1970s, and of manufacturing losses that came after a shift from an agricultural economy.

But even with all those similarities, there’s no denying the influence of Fort Bragg and more than 42,000 veterans that live in Cumberland County.<sup>3</sup> Long-time former Mayor Tony Chavonne (he served from 2005–2013) says businesses who may be considering coming to the region aren’t familiar with military markets; he notes that while Fayetteville might never be a “huge engine, like Vegas or places in Florida, military communities will be steady; we just don’t have the volatility; part of the challenge is that people don’t understand them.” He worries, too, that the community lacks a sophisticated marketing effort to translate the skills of a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to a civilian job description. And more than just job descriptions, are community leaders clear enough about the economic sectors that could benefit the most from Fayetteville’s unique mix of assets? Broadwell agrees, noting that Fort Bragg is “a real strength”—with more generals than any installation other than the Pentagon and large numbers of postsecondary degree holders transitioning out of the service—“if we can take advantage of it.”

## THE CHALLENGE: IDENTITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

“You think the military is everything, but it’s not everything,” says Jim Lott, director of the Cumberland County Office of Workforce Development, insisting that Fort Bragg obviously can’t be ignored, but there are many other factors that contribute to who can thrive in the city. Without big industry, the largest employers are the public school system, Cape Fear Health system, and a Goodyear plant with approximately 2,500 employees. There is also “an almost numbing level of intergenerational poverty,” as Charles Broadwell of the Fayetteville Observer describes it. The poverty rate in Fayetteville

## Sandhills: Cumberland County

Population (2014, est) 326,328

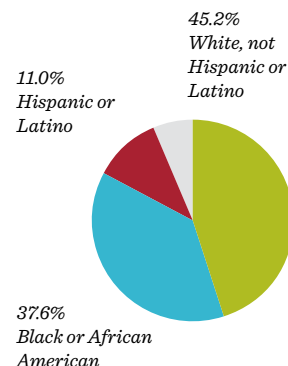
Population growth (2010–2014) 2.2%

Job growth (2010–2014) 5.7%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 5.8%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 47.5%

Unemployment rate, 2014 13.0%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

is 17 percent<sup>4</sup>; pair that with the high unemployment rate and you have a lot of individuals and families who struggle to make ends meet, build wealth, and achieve economic security.

### Employment and Educational Infrastructure

Fayetteville has a regional labor market and education system that, with the right alignment and support, could be an Infrastructure of Opportunity to connect Fayetteville residents to skill building and economic security. Lott estimates that there are about 138,000 people in the labor force, with approximately 9,000–10,000 unemployed people in any given year; that figure has stayed consistent in his four years as Workforce Development Board director. While there are nearly 6,500 high-wage manufacturing jobs in Fayetteville, factories keep closing, taking hundreds of jobs when they do. Retail and service jobs dominate the rest of the market—just over 32 percent—another sign of Fort Bragg’s influence, since those are the types of jobs typically generated by a military installation. In some ways, Fayetteville is a mill town, but instead of a mill, it has a military base that, while generating some good jobs and a lot of low-wage employment, still crowds out an alternative economic identity.

For those looking for real economic mobility, the available service sector jobs aren’t sufficient; Mary Holmes, executive director of the Cumberland Community Foundation, says young people in the area “want something where they have a path forward.” There are some significant headwinds, though. Sixty percent of the students in Cumberland County Schools (CCS) are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch. And while the achievement gap between black and white students has narrowed in recent years, the gap between low-wealth and affluent students is growing. Some of this may be affected by economic segregation in the schools. According to data from the Urban Institute and the Southern Education Fund, 27 percent of low-income students in CCS attend high poverty schools, compared to only 8 percent of non-low-income students. And black students are three times as likely to be in high-poverty schools (27 percent) as white students (9 percent).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-year estimate; <sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; <sup>5</sup> High-poverty schools are schools where more than 75 percent of students come from low-income families. Low-income students are ones who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.



What are the chances a child **raised in the lowest quintile** of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Fayetteville Commuting Zone** (*Cumberland, Hoke, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Scotland*)

Lowest quintile	39%
Lower Middle Quintile	31%
Middle Quintile	17%
Upper Middle Quintile	9%
Highest Quintile	4%

### *Helping Infrastructure*

Many of those living on the edge find support at Fayetteville Urban Ministry. According to Hanelly Estrella, operations manager, the organization serves more than 10,000 people a year through a variety of emergency assistance, home repair, literacy, and youth mentoring programs. Those that seek emergency assistance are mostly single parents—typically women—as well as veterans and the elderly. Speaking of those single mothers, Estrella says, “It’s difficult for them to go to school, have a job, and be a parent all at the same time.” The veterans she serves face challenging barriers like

transportation, homelessness, and mental health issues. Katherine Williams, N.C. State Commander of the National Association of Black Veterans, a national nonprofit with local chapters serving minority and low-income veterans through direct services and partnerships with community-based and veterans’ organizations, listed these same issues when discussing the needs of the clients her all-volunteer organization serves.

While both agencies named a number of local partners—everyone from the community college to the United Way to local churches—their description seemed to match Chris Rey’s, mayor of Spring Lake, one of the many communities in the surrounding area for which Fayetteville is a commercial hub: “They have programs, but not a system to get the programs to the people.” Rey’s town abuts Fayetteville, houses many of the enlisted service members in Spring Lake’s more affordable housing, and sees many of the same issues. His residents face similar challenges and travel to Fayetteville to access services, though this is difficult with no regional transportation system.

### *Philanthropic Infrastructure*

Mary Holmes sees a clear role for the Community Foundation in tackling these challenges. The foundation began grantmaking in the mid-1980s; in the 1990s, they began a concerted effort to grow local philanthropic assets. Though they cover the entire county, Holmes says “there’s not a lot of old wealth here, not a lot of old tobacco or industrial/textile fortunes that generated formal philanthropic assets. Those were never a key driver of the economy, so when a nonprofit wants to do something, they do it with support from individual donors.” Holmes celebrates the generosity of the community—Cumberland’s per household giving rate is higher than the state average and higher than Wake County—but she knows



it is not enough to rely on individual giving to build sustainable endowments and sufficient resources for organizations to do more than survive. That's why the community foundation provides significant general operating support for local organizations and ample training on how to develop planned giving programs that, as Holmes says, "keep wealth in the community."

### THE STRATEGY: LINKING ENLISTMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND EDUCATION

#### *Education to Employment*

Another way to build wealth in the community is through education that leads to family-supporting employment with career potential. Local educational institutions are trying to make those connections. Cumberland County Schools and Fayetteville State University (FSU) partner on two early college programs to ease the transition from secondary to postsecondary study. The Cumberland Community Foundation supports these efforts with a scholarship program for participants. There are also 2 + 2 programs—an associate's degree at Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) that sets students up for just two years to completion at Fayetteville State. Jon Young, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at FSU, knows that "higher education is the vehicle to mobility, and it's harder for low-income students. But that is the origin, vision, and mission of this institution: we're trying to change that trajectory and trying to help improve the region by creating jobs, by creating wealth."

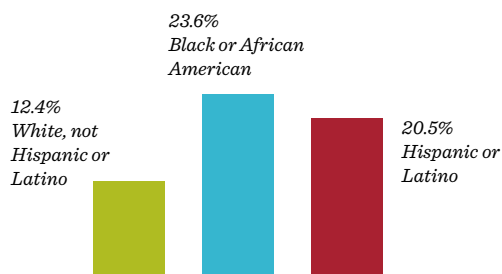
The career pathway generating the most buzz these days is Collision U at Fayetteville Technical Community College. If you ask Paul Gage, FTCC's director of transportation services technologies,

to describe the program, he'll tell you "to understand Collision U, you have to understand the collision repair industry." The gist: federal regulations will require dramatically more fuel efficient cars in the next 10 years at the same time that standards for crash ratings have doubled. To make a car more fuel efficient, you make it lighter or more aerodynamic. The things that make the car safer make it heavier. That means that vehicles are using new, extremely advanced materials—"space-age," says Gage—and repairing these materials and the correlating measurement systems require equally advanced skills. According to Gage, "most community college programs are still teaching restoration models in collision repair courses; FTCC is the first that teaches these new technologies and materials." The FTCC program is a two-year, cohort-based program that costs \$5,500. (For-profit training schools offering less advanced, restoration curriculum, could cost tens of thousands.) Students who complete the program leave with an associate's degree, several nationally recognized industry certificates, and the skills for an entry-level position with a starting salary in the \$40,000–\$50,000 range at a variety of local or national dealerships or collision repair shops. (In addition to work in body shops, graduates are qualified to be insurance adjusters or handle technical sales for a paint or equipment manufacturer.) The two-year program runs on eight-week block schedules, with a new cohort starting every eight weeks. Right now, there are eight cohorts, with 140 students on their way to a new career. Gage built the program as a technical trainer for Nationwide Insurance, but brought it to Fayetteville Tech because of their willingness to participate. The college worked closely with industry to develop curriculum—from technical skills to professionalism—and have built partnerships with rental car companies, dealerships, and national collision repair shops. In this case, it was a relationship, not a particular economic development

## Equity Indicators: Cumberland County

### Poverty rate

17.4%

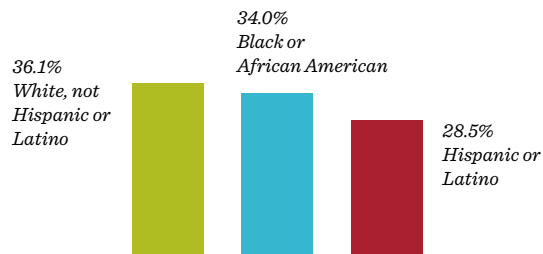


Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$22.13 (\$46,031)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	18%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$53,025

### Postsecondary educational attainment (25+), 2014

Total population

34.0%



### Median household income (in 2014 dollars)

Population	\$44,778
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$51,192
Black or African American	\$39,764
Hispanic or Latino	\$33,067



or educational programming strategy, that brought Collision U to FTCC. However, Gage sees the structure of the program—from class schedule to professional certifications to industry input—as a model that could be applied to other technical programs.

### *Enlistment, Education, Employment*

Many of Fayetteville's residents are trying to make a different move: from enlistment in the military to further education and civilian employment after leaving the service. Approximately 50 percent of servicemen and women remain in Fayetteville after discharge. While they've had significant experience, much of it directly relevant to civilian employment opportunities from healthcare to technology to engineering, they may have gaps to fill and need some support to translate their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) into a civilian position. For those on the job hunt, Jim Lott has seven veterans' counselors in the Office of Workforce Development. For those seeking training and education, there are options right on base at Fort Bragg to start the process. FTCC partners with Fort Bragg Transition University, with funding from the Cumberland Workforce Development Board, to offer a free Transition Tech program to veterans and transitioning service members. The 10–12 week program includes a military credit articulation review to secure any educational credits available based on the service members' experience. They also complete North Carolina Community College's Human Resource Development program, and technical training—with related industry-focused certificates and credentials—in information technology, logistics/supply, and telecommunications/fiber optics cabling. After completion of a training program, participants receive résumé-writing assistance and go through mock interviews to help them prepare for the civilian workforce. As David Brand,



Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024  
*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$22.13*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
29-1141	Registered Nurses	2,906	3,194	288	10%	\$30.43	Associate's degree
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	1,489	1,726	237	16%	\$25.16	Doctoral or professional degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,640	1,802	162	10%	\$50.29	Bachelor's degree
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	1,069	1,212	143	13%	\$22.40	High school diploma or equivalent
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	1,698	1,802	104	6%	\$35.06	High school diploma or equivalent
29-2021	Dental Hygienists	207	291	84	41%	\$33.27	Associate's degree
13-1081	Logisticians	497	580	83	17%	\$38.02	Bachelor's degree
13-1111	Management Analysts	562	642	80	14%	\$35.40	Bachelor's degree
49-3011	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians	388	466	78	20%	\$28.13	Postsecondary non-degree award
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	126	196	70	56%	\$28.84	Bachelor's degree

senior vice president at FTCC, says of all his students, “I don’t want people getting jobs—I want them to get professions and careers.” Transition Tech is one way that FTCC, Fort Bragg, the Workforce Development Board, and local employers like Comptia, Cisco, Lenox HVAC, and Duke Energy are working together to get veterans on the path to a post-military career.

NEXT STEPS: MAGNIFYING INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS

Many people in Fayetteville’s large institutions are well aware of where Fayetteville sits on the economic mobility list, and many of them are responding. Yet, as Jim Lott of the Cumberland County Office of Workforce Development says, “The challenge is linking all the systems. We have most of the pieces in place here. I don’t know that they’re stitched together well enough.” That stitching together requires the education systems, nonprofit organizations, and private employers to have a data-based economic vision of how the city’s unique assets can attract family-supporting work—and if the vision doesn’t yet exist, it needs to be built, with all those same players at the table.

The convenor—the one who can bring people to the table, who can make it an inclusive table, and keep people focused and taking concrete steps toward a vision—is an essential part of any effort to strengthen an infrastructure of opportunity. Mary Holmes

*“We’re trying to change that trajectory and trying to help improve the region by creating jobs, by creating wealth.”*

believes there is will among local leaders, but the way is difficult; she laments that “there are individual organizations that are willing to collaborate, but there’s not enough slack in their organizations to send someone to participate in meetings and collaborations. If someone comes to a meeting, what are they leaving undone? People leading organizations are also the people delivering the programs. Because of low staffing levels, local nonprofits simply don’t have a warm body to send without closing up their shops for the day.”

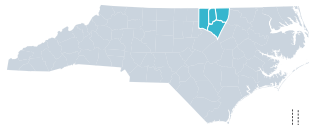
This community champions the individual grit and motivation that are a practical part of making good things happen. You see it in the stories of FTCC staff members reaching out to help a struggling student, in the generosity of private donors who support helping agencies and the arts, and in local leaders who nurture one-on-one, cross-institutional relationships to keep important partnerships alive. As Larry Keen, president of Fayetteville Tech, says, “We have to be more effective and efficient in what we promise as an institution and community; that’s bigger than any one organization or person. It takes a multitude of people to do that.”

# CULTIVATING ASPIRATIONS: VANCE, GRANVILLE, FRANKLIN & WARREN COUNTIES



## THE PLACE:

A rural, four-county region with an intertwined history and economy, but limited access to family-sustaining work with career potential depending on proximity to the nearby dynamic metro area



**THE CHALLENGE:** A history of exploitive and low-wage work that influences expectations and aspirations for individual mobility and economic growth

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Innovations in the K-12 sector; a community college presence in all four counties that links education and employment; a history of community organizing to address racial, economic, and environmental inequities

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT: TOBACCO, TEXTILES, AND TRAVEL TIME

Stretching from the northeastern edge of the Research Triangle metro area along I-85 to the Virginia border, along the shores of Lake Kerr and Lake Gaston, the four-county region of Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren remains distinctly rural despite its proximity to one of the state's most economically dynamic areas. The region's economic history is archetypal North Carolina: tobacco and cotton farming, driven by slave-labor until the end of the Civil War, followed by a manufacturing and mill-based economy for much of the 20th century. Timothy B. Tyson explains the primacy of tobacco in the region's history in *Blood Done Sign My Name*:

*Tobacco put food on our tables,  
steeples on our churches, stains  
on our fingers, spots on our lungs,  
and contradictions in our hearts.*



*A hundred years after the fall of slavery, C.G. Credle Elementary School still didn't open until mid-September, after the farm children were finished 'priming' and 'putting in' tobacco—picking the leaves and hanging them in wood-fired barns to cure. Bright golden leaves blew off the trucks and littered the streets every autumn.*

While the agricultural and manufacturing engines of commerce created immense wealth for owners and managers, and stable employment for many workers, their legacy presents unique challenges for broadening economic opportunity in the region today. These four counties have an intertwined history—both political and economic—and face a similar fate today: they must build stronger pathways to postsecondary education and careers, and they must change the conversation about persistent poverty and what kinds of community investments are possible.

In 1860, 28,563 people in the region, or 54 percent of the total population, were enslaved people. There were more slaves in Granville County than in any other county in North Carolina, and in Warren County, the slave population was twice that of the white population—the highest ratio in the state. Free African Americans, often masons and other skilled laborers, made up another four percent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

Vance County was created in 1881 from portions of Granville, Franklin, and Warren counties in order to concentrate the black Republican vote, part of post-Reconstruction efforts to disenfranchise black voters. By the turn of the 20th century, Jim Crow laws were in full effect, and the legal, social, and economic rights of African Americans in the area were significantly constrained.

Political changes were simultaneous with economic ones. When enslaved people were freed at the end of the Civil War, many became sharecroppers, an exploitative system in which land owners provided land and resources to farmers in exchange for a significant portion of the crop. Shifts at the turn of the century meant that the regional economy was no longer solely agricultural; Henderson Cotton Mill opened in 1896 in Vance County, and its owners opened the Harriet Mill across town in 1901. While the mills provided substantial employment in the region throughout the 20th century, black workers were only considered for the lowest-wage positions, and that economy created inequity by keeping wages low. The textile workers unionized in the 1940s, and a strike in the 1950s led to extended mill closures and violence, with the strikers eventually mostly replaced by new workers.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1910 and 1970, six million African Americans left the South—mostly from rural communities—in search of economic

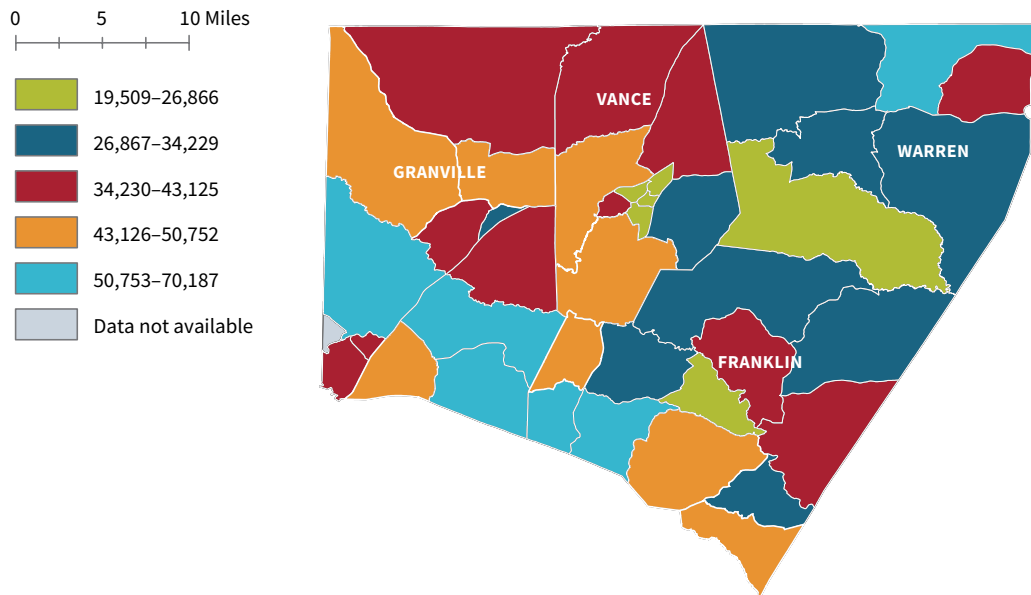


opportunity and to escape oppressive Jim Crow conditions. This massive population shift, known as the Great Migration, was felt in Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren counties: between 1950 and 1970, the African American population in the region decreased by nearly 10,000 people, or 16 percent. While the prospect of jobs and upward mobility certainly pulled people to the North, many felt themselves pushed away from the communities they called home because of entrenched racism, legalized segregation, and white supremacist violence.

The area also has a strong history of community organizing and activism, particularly civil rights organizing. After the racially motivated murder in 1970 of Henry Marrow, a young African-American Vietnam veteran, in Oxford, N.C. (the subject of Tim Tyson's *Blood Done Sign My Name*), Benjamin Chavis, an Oxford native who was then the statewide youth coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and later the executive director of the NAACP, organized a boycott of the town's white businesses that pressured leaders to integrate. In Warren County during the 1970s, Floyd McKissick led a different kind of organizing: the development of Soul City, a planned multi-racial community with an explicit mission of black empowerment. Ultimately, the economic downturn and political opposition prevented Soul City's completion. While Soul City did not flourish into the thriving community that McKissick and others envisioned, the infrastructure continues to be used, and it created organizing energy that continued in the region.<sup>4</sup> For example, in the early 1980s, when the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources decided to build a PCB landfill in Warren County, the community responded with protests against the significant public

<sup>1</sup> "The Spread of U.S. Slavery, 1790–1860," Lincoln Mullen, interactive map, <http://lincolnmullen.com/projects/slavery/>; <sup>2</sup> "Harriet-Henderson Cotton Mills Strike," Maurice C. York, NCPedia, 2006. <http://ncpedia.org/harriet-henderson-cotton-mills-strike/>; <sup>3</sup> Accessed November 2015: <http://www.gisforhistory.org/projects/greatmigration/#/>; <sup>4</sup> "The Time Republicans Helped Build an All-Black Town Called 'Soul City,'" Brentin Mock, *CityLab*, November 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/11/the-time-republicans-helped-build-an-all-black-town-called-soul-city/414585>

## Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren Counties Median Household Income



### North Central Region: Vance County

Population (2014, est.) 44,614

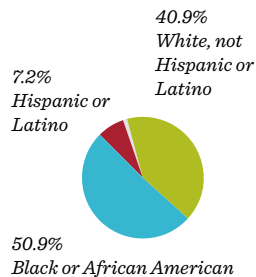
Population growth (2010–2014) -1.8%

Job growth (2010–2014) -8.2%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 12.6%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 49.2%

Unemployment rate, 2014 11.7%



### North Central Region: Granville County

Population (2014, est.) 58,500

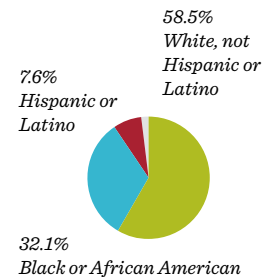
Population growth (2010–2014) 1.7%

Job growth (2010–2014) 4.0%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 14.5%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 51.2%

Unemployment rate, 2014 10.0%



### North Central Region: Franklin County

Population (2014, est.) 62,860

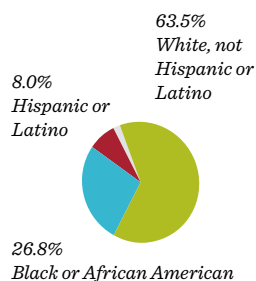
Population growth (2010–2014) 3.7%

Job growth (2010–2014) 7.4%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 17.9%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 53.5%

Unemployment rate, 2014 12.1%



### North Central Region: Warren County

Population (2014, est.) 20,231

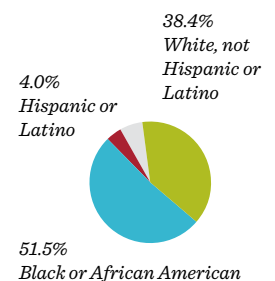
Population growth (2010–2014) -3.5%

Job growth (2010–2014) -14.9%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 13.0%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 42.1%

Unemployment rate, 2014 9.6%



What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Raleigh Commuting Zone** (*Chatham, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, Orange, Person, Wake*)

Lowest quintile	39%
Lower Middle Quintile	30%
Middle Quintile	17%
Upper Middle Quintile	10%
Highest Quintile	5%

**Henderson Commuting Zone** (*Vance, Warren*)

Lowest quintile	43%
Lower Middle Quintile	29%
Middle Quintile	17%
Upper Middle Quintile	7%
Highest Quintile	3%

health risks. Hundreds were arrested. Because the area was predominantly African American and low-wealth and the conditions at other sites would have been more environmentally responsible, the decision to locate the landfill there led Benjamin Chavis to start using the term “environmental racism.”<sup>5</sup>

THE CHALLENGE: SOUTHERN ISOLATION

Today, parts of Granville and Franklin counties have become bedroom communities for the Triangle—part of the halo of one of the fastest growing metros in the U.S. The labor markets of the areas blend together, potentially creating more diverse job opportunities for residents. Vance and Warren counties, while not impossibly far for determined commuters, retain their largely rural character. After centuries of economic structures that allowed few chances of upward mobility and wealth building for the majority of residents, particularly African Americans, the area continues to have high levels of inequality and poverty, especially in Vance and Warren. Unemployment is high, and for those who do have jobs, median wages are low. Educational attainment, which was unnecessary for earlier manufacturing employment, is much lower than state and national averages: only 18 percent of adults in Vance County and 20 percent in Warren County have a two-year degree or higher.<sup>6</sup> The area also faces significant

health challenges, an indication that economic change has left many in the region behind and dramatically reduced wellbeing. According to County Health Rankings, Vance County ranks 98th in North Carolina (out of 100) in an index of health factors, including health behavior, access to care, and social and economic factors. Warren County is ranked 92nd, while Franklin and Granville are ranked higher (53rd and 43rd, respectively).<sup>7</sup> In Vance and Warren, 20 percent of people were uninsured in 2015, almost twice the national average (though that figure is down from 25 percent in 2013). In Franklin and Granville, 15 percent were uninsured.<sup>8</sup>

In the mill economy there were large disparities between the wealth of the managerial level and the subsistence of the workers. While the mill economy created many problems and deepened inequality, it did provide employment stability for many residents. When the mills closed, many of the affluent people left the area, and displaced workers were stuck with limited job opportunities and no transferrable skills. Once it became clear that the mill jobs were not coming back, decline set in. Many people in once-thriving neighborhoods full of old mill houses fell into poverty; not much later, a perception that they were blighted and filled with crime fed a cycle of disinvestment that lowered property values and diminished the tax base. According to Terry Garrison, a Vance County commissioner, “This area has an image problem that affects business recruitment.” Too many years with a culture of resignation, one where the traditional economic elite watched things happen rather than making things happen, took a toll.

This rapid decline has created a sense that poverty is an intractable problem. “There is such a tremendous amount of apathy, with people focused on ‘me and mine,’” says Paul Ross, director of the YMCA in Henderson. Many people of means have left the area or disengaged, according to Ross, creating a lack of resources and leaving the community fragmented. “In place of Southern hospitality, we have Southern isolation,” says Harry Mills, director of the Granville County Economic Development Department. In parts of the region, many affluent families have enrolled their children in private schools. In this environment, young people growing up in low-income families aren’t getting much positive reinforcement from the community. People make assumptions about who is worthy of respect based on their appearance. “We assume that because people look a certain way, they don’t deserve attention and respect,” says Jackie Sergeant, mayor of Oxford. The sense of apathy, fragmentation, and disconnection has only exacerbated the community’s problems. “Too many people seem paralyzed by past failures—we aren’t spending enough time lifting up current success stories,” says Dr. Anthony Jackson, the new superintendent of Vance County schools. In Dr. Jackson’s view, this mindset is the first thing that needs to change.

THE STRATEGY: BIG ASPIRATIONS AND INNOVATION FOR EDUCATION

Many of the region’s visible challenges, including health outcomes, drug dependence, and vacant residential and commercial properties, will be difficult to change without economic development, and businesses are unlikely to invest in the area if

<sup>5</sup> “How the Collapse of ‘Soul City’ Fired Up the Environmental Justice Movement,” Brentin Mock, *CityLab*, November 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/11/how-the-collapse-of-soul-city-fired-up-the-environmental-justice-movement/415530/>; <sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; <sup>7</sup> County Health Rankings, A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation program, <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>; <sup>8</sup> “Changing Uninsured Rates by County — From 2013 to 2015,” Enroll America, interactive map. <https://www.enrollamerica.org/research-maps/maps/changes-in-uninsured-rates-by-county>

### Equity Indicators: Vance County

<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>25.5%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	14.4%
Black or African American	33.2%
Hispanic or Latino	36.1%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$34,075</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$47,841
Black or African American	\$26,354
Hispanic or Latino	\$36,222
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.09 (\$43,863)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	21.8%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$37,892
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total population, 2010–2014</b>	<b>20.5%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino 2011–2013	24.6%
Black or African American, 2011–2013	16.6%
Hispanic or Latino	N/A

### Equity Indicators: Granville County

<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	11.2%
Black or African American	22.8%
Hispanic or Latino	35.9%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$49,655</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$54,574
Black or African American	\$36,336
Hispanic or Latino	\$45,435
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.56 (\$44,848)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	20.4%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$50,183
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total population, 2010–2014</b>	<b>27.0%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino 2011–2013	30.0%
Black or African American, 2011–2013	19.2%
Hispanic or Latino	N/A

### Equity Indicators: Franklin County

<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>15.4%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	11.5%
Black or African American	22.6%
Hispanic or Latino	26.7%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$42,763</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$51,949
Black or African American	\$27,497
Hispanic or Latino	\$36,545
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$22.40 (\$45,594)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	18.9%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$44,119
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total population, 2010–2014</b>	<b>28.2%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino 2011–2013	32.3%
Black or African American, 2011–2013	18.7%
Hispanic or Latino	N/A

### Equity Indicators: Warren County

<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>24.8%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	16.2%
Black or African American	28.7%
Hispanic or Latino	36.7%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$34,953</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$47,552
Black or African American	\$27,555
Hispanic or Latino	\$31,406
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$20.92 (\$43,511)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	22.5%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$36,849
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total Population, 2010–2014</b>	<b>21.6%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino 2011–2013	30.5%
Black or African American, 2011–2013	13.8%
Hispanic or Latino	N/A

## Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014 – 2024 Franklin, Vance, Warren, and Granville Counties

*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child –  
\$22.40 (Franklin), \$21.09 (Vance), \$20.92 (Warren), \$21.56 (Granville)*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
29-1141	Registered Nurses	1,012	1,169	157	16%	\$27.16	Associate's degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	620	759	139	22%	\$48.45	Bachelor's degree
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	468	573	105	22%	\$24.22	High school diploma or equivalent
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	202	271	69	34%	\$21.84	High school diploma or equivalent
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	424	489	65	15%	\$21.03	High school diploma or equivalent
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	410	475	65	16%	\$26.27	Postsecondary non-degree award
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	341	404	63	18%	\$28.26	Bachelor's degree
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	453	509	56	12%	\$25.47	Doctoral or professional degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	339	391	52	15%	\$27.63	High school diploma or equivalent
15-1132	Software Developers, Applications	99	149	50	51%	\$36.69	Bachelor's degree

they do not see people with the skills they need or the potential of local training systems to adapt and provide those skills. “There is an undeniable connection between education, health, and economic status, and those collectively impact the local economy,” says Val Short, with Triangle North Healthcare Foundation. While leaders want to attack those issues from every angle they can, including expanding health care access and quality, one of their biggest priorities is to find innovative ways to improve education outcomes and prepare people for work.

For that to happen, pathways to economic opportunity need to be concrete and accessible, but there is also, as Dr. Jackson says, a mindset change needed. “Being poor doesn’t relegate you to being unsuccessful,” says Carolyn Paylor, executive director of Franklin-Granville-Vance Smart Start. Young people in the community need to know that their future matters and that the community wants them to succeed; poverty is not an excuse to give up on them. Rather than imposing limitations on what they can achieve, their aspirations should be cultivated. In order to really change the prospects for the community’s youth, leaders need to reduce apathy and the sense of individualism. “Everybody blooms with connectedness,” says Oxford Mayor Jackie Sergent.

Along with shifting the culture toward more collective concern for

community well-being, strategic improvements in the education-to-career continuum are being made, especially in Henderson and Vance County, where they are desperately needed. In Vance County Schools, where 91 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and the 2013 graduation rate was 65 percent (much lower than the state average of 83 percent),<sup>9</sup> there is new energy for reform. Several new programs to provide students with additional pathways to career success are underway: two career academies, one focused on medicine and another on fire and public safety, as well as an alternative high school for students who were not successful at the county’s other high schools. “We decided we needed to do something to give kids hope,” Eric Pierce, the principal at the alternative high school, told WUNC-FM in an October 2015 interview.<sup>10</sup> That school, Western Vance High School, has had a 100 percent graduation rate for the past few years; students stay until they meet the graduation requirements.

Along with other leaders in the region, Superintendent Jackson is committed to changing the conversation about student success. “We are waiting for some magic bullet program, but it’s really about building the capacity of our parents, about teaching them how to advocate for their kids to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences,” he says. Since he started as superintendent, he looks

<sup>9</sup> North Carolina School Report Cards, <http://www.ncschoolreportcard.org>; <sup>10</sup> “Perils And Promise: Educating North Carolina’s Rural Students,” Leoneda Inge, WUNC, October 2015. <http://wunc.org/post/perils-and-promise-educating-north-carolinas-rural-students#stream/0>





around and sees students, parents, and teachers who are trying in spite of difficult circumstances—and he sees many who are succeeding. He wants to make sure all students receive the support they need, even those who don't match what people imagine as a “typical” successful student.

The changes at Vance County Schools echo those of Henderson Collegiate, a charter school that opened in 2010. Current enrollment is at 620 students, and it is adding grade levels every year; 94 percent of its students are African American or Hispanic, and 86 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Eric Sanchez, who founded the school with his wife, Carice Sanchez, is a former teacher in Vance County Schools. He saw a troubling divide when he taught there—the students who started out in kindergarten less prepared than their peers just fell further and further behind every year, while students whose parents knew how to support their learning and had the time and skills to advocate were well served, often by the Academically Gifted program. Sanchez was distressed by this achievement gap, and particularly by the unspoken assumption that many students would never be successful.

At Henderson Collegiate, Sanchez and his staff are creating a culture that sets clear expectations for all students to succeed. Their students' test scores are higher than North Carolina averages, and they even exceed the average state scores for students who are not economically disadvantaged, defying many people's assumptions about who can succeed in school. Henderson Collegiate will graduate its first students in 2019 and the school is carefully planning ways to support students as they select and transition to college. Each high school grade will have its own college counselor, and the school is starting to build relationships with colleges that have their own support programs for first-generation students. Talk of college is infused into everything, from the school's name to classroom walls where teachers proudly display pennant flags from

their alma maters. But they also know that students need a clear and concrete path to get there. Classes are structured to “provide immediate attainability of incremental goals,” says Sanchez, and both individual and collective learning are celebrated. One eighth grade student showed us a tally of points for reading books of their choice from the class library beyond those assigned; she was the frontrunner, but one of her classmates was quick to point out that “it's about more than just the points—it's about building knowledge, because knowledge is power, and power is freedom.” In the afternoon, bulletin boards in the hallway display quality work completed that same morning. A test was displayed with a note from the student at the bottom, “Did I crush this test?” The teacher had checked yes.

Henderson Collegiate's commitment to educating students from low-wealth families distinguishes it from a large number of charter schools in the state. Because state funding for charter schools can't be used for transportation and food, many charter schools do not provide buses or lunch, which are huge expenses. Those are necessities for many families in the area; parents who work in low-wage jobs are unlikely to have the schedule flexibility to drive their kids to school every day, and some may not even have consistent access to a car. With 29 percent of children in the county food insecure, many families rely on school meals for their children's nutrition.<sup>11</sup> Henderson Collegiate does provide transportation and meals and sees them as mission-critical, but it takes significant effort to obtain grants large enough to cover those expenses. “The state funding model could be adapted to ensure that charter schools can and will be accountable for educating low-income students,” says Sanchez. While the people of this region need an entire system of public schools that provides a quality education at scale, Henderson Collegiate is proving that low-income is not synonymous with low achievement.

<sup>11</sup> “Food Insecurity: Data by County,” Feeding America. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/data-by-county-in-each-state.html>



The region's education landscape is anchored by the area's community college, which serves all four counties. The role of community colleges, particularly in rural areas, extends far beyond the academic. In this region, as in many other rural regions, the community college is the only postsecondary institution, and in that role it serves as a workforce trainer, leading employer, community convener, cultural ambassador, and change agent. In each of these capacities, community colleges are positioned to make significant contributions to the overall improvement of the community's health. "Vance-Granville Community College (VGCC) has the capacity and flexibility to do almost anything this area needs in education and workforce development," says Linda Worth, the county manager in Warren County. With its main campus in Henderson and campuses in each of the four counties, VGCC is a central part of nearly every educational and career pathway in the area, and diverse offerings and partnerships have cemented it as a hub of education, workforce development, and regional advancement. "One of the most valuable assets we have is Vance-Granville Community College," says Oxford Mayor Jackie Sergent.

VGCC has partnered with the local school systems to establish early-college programs in each of the four counties. Students enroll at the start of high school and graduate with a two-year degree, or college credit, within five years. VGCC is also partnering with four-year institutions to ensure students have an array of degree options and clear academic pathways; through a partnership with North Carolina Central University (NCCU), students can complete a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice on the VGCC campus.<sup>12</sup> In addition to preparing students to transfer and pursue additional education, VGCC is working to align the training with the needs of local employers. VGCC has identified employers with specific skill needs and included them in program design to ensure students have desired technical skills. As a result, two campuses have biotechnology labs where a "BioWork" Process Technician training course is offered through the continuing education program to prepare students for careers as process technicians within bioprocess, pharmaceutical, or chemical manufacturing companies; there is also a bioprocessing technician degree program offered. A momentous new program at VGCC is the mechatronics engineering technology degree, which prepares students for highly technical jobs in industrial maintenance and manufacturing and relies on important partnerships with local employers and the career and technical education programs in the high schools. That program was made possible with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) Grant Program, which also allowed VGCC to expand the welding program to an associate degree level. "We need to make sure students have multiple educational pathways and our employers can find people with the skills they need," says Harry Mills, director of the Granville County Economic Development Commission.

"There are many options other than four-year college," says Ronnie Goswick, director of the Franklin County Economic Development Commission. Given the blending of the local labor

market with the neighboring metro area, VGCC is focused on equipping students with varied skills so they can work locally or compete for jobs with the highly educated population in the Research Triangle.

## NEXT STEPS: ORGANIZING AROUND A VISION

Pockets of innovation and excellence in the region show what is possible for the future. The K–12 school systems and Vance-Granville Community College are working to ensure educational pathways are robust and the local workforce attracts and grows diverse businesses, and the Kerr-Tar Youth Council, coordinated by the Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments, plans employment and training programs for youth in the region. But the region still needs strong collaborative leadership to organize around a vision for the future economy. Far too many families in this area—and even entire communities—struggle to make ends meet with limited resources. Even with a comparatively low cost-of-living, it is difficult to get by on the minimum wage, and it is practically impossible to build wealth and invest in your family's future. Positioned in the Triangle's outer ring, many of the area's residents will have better luck finding family-supporting work if they are able to commute, but only if local education and training systems prepare them well. And even with sufficient training, low-income people will be at a disadvantage because of inconsistent access to transportation.

Given the complex nature of the problems facing this region—problems that are too big for any one organization to tackle—it will take long-term, cohesive planning by a multi-sector group of leaders to strengthen opportunities for upward mobility. "Because we have limited resources, we need to coalesce around a common vision," says Dr. Stelfanie Williams, president of Vance-Granville Community College. That common vision and the structures for collaboration and alignment between institutions do not currently exist, but they will need to emerge for the region to improve outcomes at scale. Achieving those goals will require broad alliances, including the involvement of employers, which has been difficult as the economy has restructured. Additional investment in the capacity of local nonprofits and civic organizations is also needed so that they better address issues that prevent educational progress and career connection.

Local leaders must also continue their work to change the conversation about poverty and who is likely to succeed. "We can't allow poverty to be an excuse for not providing opportunity," says Superintendent Jackson. Changing that mentality will take inclusive planning strategies: rather than creating a regional vision for low-income people, they must do it in partnership with them. After centuries of exploitative economic conditions, it is time for the region's people to share ownership of the region's economic transition and their future. As Lisa Harrison, director of the Granville Vance District Health Department, says, "We need to make it clear that this region values people and economic growth: those aren't competing priorities."

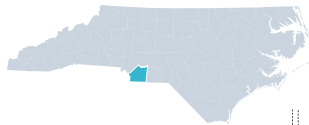
<sup>12</sup> "NCCU, Vance-Granville Community College Launch Program," North Carolina Central University. <http://www.nccu.edu/news/index.cfm?id=EBDEA1EC-15C5-F8D8-3A58DAA8180498CC>

# THINKING AHEAD OF THE GROWTH CURVE: MONROE



## THE PLACE:

A city in one of North Carolina's fastest growing counties—and near the state's largest metro area—with a diverse manufacturing sector and a growing Latino population



**THE CHALLENGE:** Ensuring coordinated planning for continued residential and economic growth; involving new Hispanic population in leadership and visioning

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Established employer and education partnerships, convened by the Chamber of Commerce, and supported by a workforce development board with regional outlook

*“It’s been a wonderful summer in downtown Monroe: car cruise-ins and concerts and not a single one rained out. The last concert of the season is tonight...”*

Stepping out of the vintage clothing store into downtown Monroe, you miss the rest of the weekend calendar on the radio, but see more of the sites of the wonderful summer. It’s a downtown typical of many North Carolina towns this size: a few unique boutiques, a coffee shop with farm-to-table fare and chalkboard menus, attorneys’ offices, advertising in both English and Spanish, and more vacant buildings than the tourism office wants to see, including the old Center Theater.

Yet every city—even the typical ones—have their own stories, and Monroe’s is about how a small North Carolina city handles explosive growth and ensures that everyone—

especially its new population—can take advantage of that growth. An hour from Charlotte, in fast-growing Union County, Monroe is home to an impressively diverse manufacturing base, sandwiched between the rural, agricultural parts of Union County on the east and the bedroom community (or county) of residential growth on the west, closest to—and more closely identified with—Charlotte. But, as City Manager Larry Faison says, “The density is working its way out,” and that means more change for Monroe.

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Residential growth in the western part of Union County spurred growth of service sector jobs and other employment; job growth in Monroe from 2004–14 was 20 percent, higher than any other community profiled in this report. Much of this growth came from an influx of Latino people; they now are nearly 30 percent of Monroe’s approximately 34,000 residents (but only 11 percent of Union County’s total population of 218,568). Many came for economic opportunities in the manufacturing and processing industries in the area. Union County is home to nearly 150 manufacturers, and the bulk—and the largest—are within Monroe city limits, along with the executive airport that serves them. Todd Morris, director of corporate training at South Piedmont Community College, says, “Union County especially has always had a diverse industry base—from poultry processing to aerospace; it hasn’t changed, although the technology has changed over the years, and with that, higher skill requirements for some of the workforce.” There is a 40-year history of precision manufacturing that local economic development efforts have built on to bring supportive industries and new technologies, like O’Neill Digital Solutions, announced in 2015. The intentional diversification in size and sector has been key, along with South Piedmont Community College, where students can get the required skill sets for entry-level and incumbent positions. According to a Monroe/Union County Economic Development 2015 labor shed study (with nearly 30 percent of industries participating), 40 percent of manufacturing sector employees live in Monroe, with a higher proportion of hourly employees in the city.

## Southwest: Union County

**Population (2014, est.)** 218,568

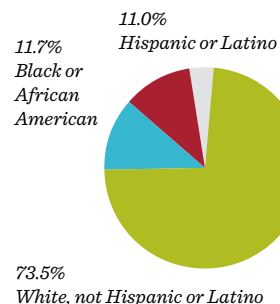
Population growth (2010–2014) 8.6%

Job growth (2010–2014) 19.2%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 15.8%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 62.2%

Unemployment rate, 2014 9.2%



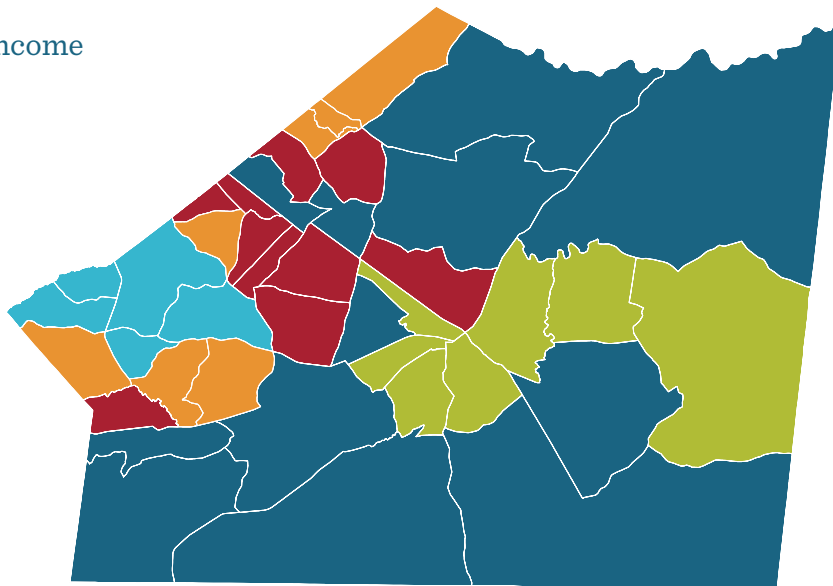
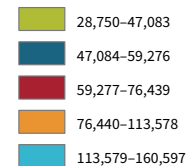
For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

## THE CHALLENGE: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

That industry base is vital to creating good jobs. Pat Kahle, president of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, defines a good job this way: “Salary and sustainability; we have the skill set to fill it; the worker is able to reinvest in and live in our community.” Vail Carter, business services coordinator at Centralina Workforce Development Board, when asked for his definition of a good job, hit on similar points and added, “We’re looking for jobs with a career pathway, so someone can see it and have a way to get there; it’s a job that gives some quality of life: wealth creation, better skills, and the ability to do better than the generation before.” Doing better than the generation that’s gone before is becoming increasingly difficult, and even in a community with strong industry, not everyone is able to get ahead. Though Monroe has an unemployment rate at 5.1 percent (lower than the state average), the poverty rate is still 21 percent. Educational attainment levels, often cited as a key to upward mobility, show significant racial disparities.

## Union County Median Household Income

0 5 10 Miles







Monroe and their Union County partners showed remarkable forethought in planning for the physical infrastructure necessary to meet the growing demands of new residents and industry—even though the pace still had them playing catch-up sometimes. That same forethought can be applied to building an infrastructure of opportunity that connects individuals to education and economic success, all along their career path, and regardless of race or zip code.

## THE STRATEGY: EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT

### *Engaging employers*

Vail Carter sits at this intersection of community, education, and industry; well, really, he drives through it daily as he's travelling through the seven counties in the Centralina Workforce Development Board's service region. He says, "When you're traveling seven counties, you hear themes, such as succession planning. It's about being proactive. You have to come up with a solution before the employers realize there's a problem."

A regional perspective becomes a strategic perspective when there's someone paying attention to common challenges and lifting up effective practices. The Union County Chamber of Commerce convenes two groups that provide a venue for this kind of thinking and sharing for Monroe and the county: the Manufacturing Executives Roundtable and the Workforce

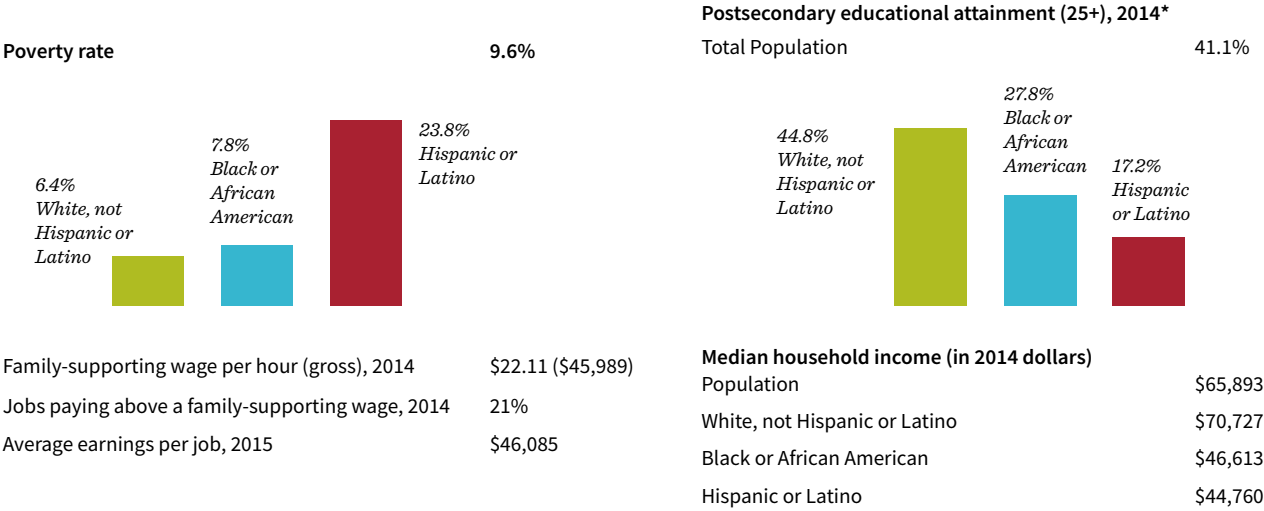
Development Coalition. The Roundtable industry executives meet quarterly to benchmark progress and identify issues that require collective action. Stanley Sidor, president of South Piedmont Community College, sees particular value in this group: "We have industry advisors at the college and program level, but you need the senior [leadership] perspective, and it isn't good to convene that from one leg of the system. Someone has to step back and

*"It's about being proactive. You have to come up with a solution before the employers realize there's a problem."*

look at the education system and how it connects with business. We're all active participants in how to create and improve the work pool." That education-business connection is strengthened by the Workforce Development Coalition, which includes employers, large and small, as well as the community college, the K-12 system, and the local workforce system.

Pat Kahle, Union County Chamber president, realizes the importance of both groups—and the importance of bringing them together. The two groups hold an annual joint meeting; as Kahle says, "Education doesn't speak business; and business doesn't speak education. What we try to do is translate." This annual meeting is an opportunity for both groups to share what's

Equity Indicators: Union County



Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024

Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$22.11

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	898	1,043	145	16%	\$48.14	Bachelor's degree
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	297	428	131	44%	\$26.22	Doctoral or professional degree
29-1141	Registered Nurses	764	883	119	16%	\$25.06	Associate's degree
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	534	638	104	19%	\$29.19	Bachelor's degree
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	382	479	97	25%	\$23.61	High school diploma or equivalent
13-1111	Management Analysts	240	331	91	38%	\$32.72	Bachelor's degree
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	941	1,028	87	9%	\$26.09	High school diploma or equivalent
49-3021	Automotive Body and Related Repairers	138	198	60	43%	\$22.55	High school diploma or equivalent
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	152	207	55	36%	\$27.71	Bachelor's degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	277	326	49	18%	\$28.28	High school diploma or equivalent



What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Charlotte Commuting Zone** (*Anson, Cabarrus, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, Union*)

Lowest quintile	38%
Lower Middle Quintile	31%
Middle Quintile	17%
Upper Middle Quintile	9%
Highest Quintile	4%

happening, reflect on how the systems are working together, and identify opportunities for improvement. Kahle says that since these meetings began, conversations have “become more open and more frequent—there’s more listening.” These structures for engaging business and education could be a key piece of a stronger, more inclusive infrastructure of opportunity for Monroe.

### *Engaging New Community Members*

The growing Latino community is trying to connect to Monroe’s education-to-career continuum. Jessica Brewer is the Monroe branch manager of the Latino Community Credit Union (LCCU). LCCU serves 60,000 members across the state; for 45,000 of those, LCCU represents their first experience with a financial institution. Ninety percent of credit union members are low-income, most self-employed in cleaning services or the construction industry. They are interested in supporting their children’s education, both through involvement in elementary and secondary schooling and saving money for postsecondary study. Brewer says, “Who has the information has the power;” for her members, finding out about resources inspires them. LCCU provides access to inspiration and information through its Financial Education workshops, offered in partnership with the local Latino Community Development Center. The five-module course teaches about budgeting, saving, building credit, and pursuing home ownership; it also is a path to building trust in formal financial institutions, something that is crucial but difficult for individuals unfamiliar with U.S. financial systems and regulations. The workshop is an important first step to building wealth.

Doralisa Pellane, ESL program facilitator at the Literacy Council of Union County, based in Monroe, helps residents who are not native English speakers take another important step: improving their English language skills to help them connect to higher education, job, and community resources. Pellane named transportation, child care, and work schedules as some of the most significant barriers her students face in the pursuit of their language study. The Literacy Council has responded by building partnerships with Union County Public Schools, Union County Public Library,

as well as businesses and churches to host classes and tutoring sessions; in this way, they can take the classes to the students and, in the case of the new Mother Read program, involve parent and child in the learning environment. They are also working with South Piedmont Community College to help students make the transition to the college environment.

Even with the good work of these organizations, there is concern that Monroe isn’t engaging these new members of their community: Larry Faison, Monroe city manager, notes that Latinos account for more than 30 percent of the population, but aren’t currently represented on the city council and boards; Chamber director Pat Kahle worries that “we’re not getting out the message that job situations could be better with more skills training; they may not be fully aware of SPCC.” Vail Carter, from Centralina Workforce Board, wonders “if they have a voice at the table.” The table is being set among some community agencies in a Union County Latino coalition, led by Gustavo Arevalo, Union County Public Schools Latino Outreach Coordinator. The group, which includes LCCU and the Literacy Council and other community organizations, meets quarterly to discuss issues facing Latino residents, identifying other partnership opportunities, and planning events, like periodic community health and resource fairs. But there are limits on employment, economic security, and engagement for this growing part of Monroe’s community without postsecondary education and workforce training.

### *Engaging the workforce*

There’s a wide variety of activity in Monroe aimed at engaging the workforce in learning and training: from afterschool programs for elementary students, supported by the city, Housing Authority, and United Way, to 26 thematic academies in Union County Public Schools (UCPS) featuring content on everything from arts and technology to fire safety. There also are co-op, internship, and apprenticeship programs at South Piedmont Community College; a program for UCPS teachers in high poverty schools to work on a UNC-Charlotte master’s degree at reduced cost, and the Literacy Council ESL courses hosted by local businesses and the school system. All along the pathway, there are opportunities for career exposure and work-based learning for those who won’t enter the workforce for a decade and those who are more than a decade into their work life.

One special way that Monroe and Union County make these links to their specific industry base is through an annual Manufacturing Awareness Week, part of a broader “Make It in Union” campaign to spur interest in the field. The public schools, community college, and employers spend a week highlighting manufacturing through two days of corporate tours—a showcase that in 2015 highlighted 20 employers—and contests to encourage participation. (The Chamber sponsors a cash prize—for technology purchases—to the high school that earns the most points through participation of students, parents, guidance counselors, and administrators.) SPCC’s Todd Morris describes the 2015 fair this way: “The employers talked about entry-level jobs and all the different career opportunities. It’s not just making widgets; you can move through the ranks and go into accounting, sales, supervision, and quality control. They talked about career opportunities and paths in Union County and we connected it to specific training available



at SPCC.” Morris says this kind of exposure is critical, especially with the stigma that sometimes surrounds manufacturing in an area that has seen devastating factory closings over the last few decades: “Yes, companies will go away, but most of the skills are transferrable. They can retool and get a job doing something else; especially [in Union County], where the sector is diverse, not just textiles or furniture. There are opportunities to go from one industry to another.”

### NEXT STEP: WHAT’S AROUND THE NEXT CURVE?

The long-range view that built the foundation for industry and training in Monroe—and Union county as whole—is impressive; an executive airport, a nearly full industrial park, and city and county agencies that strive to work together to allocate resources and physical infrastructure. Now, they are looking to the next phase of that growth, to a highway bypass that will give them a faster route to Charlotte and open up the potential for jobs in distribution and logistics, integral to the industries that already exist there. It is not just traffic patterns that are changing in Monroe: there are new demographic patterns and old achievement patterns that suggest that without changes, not everyone will be included in prosperity.

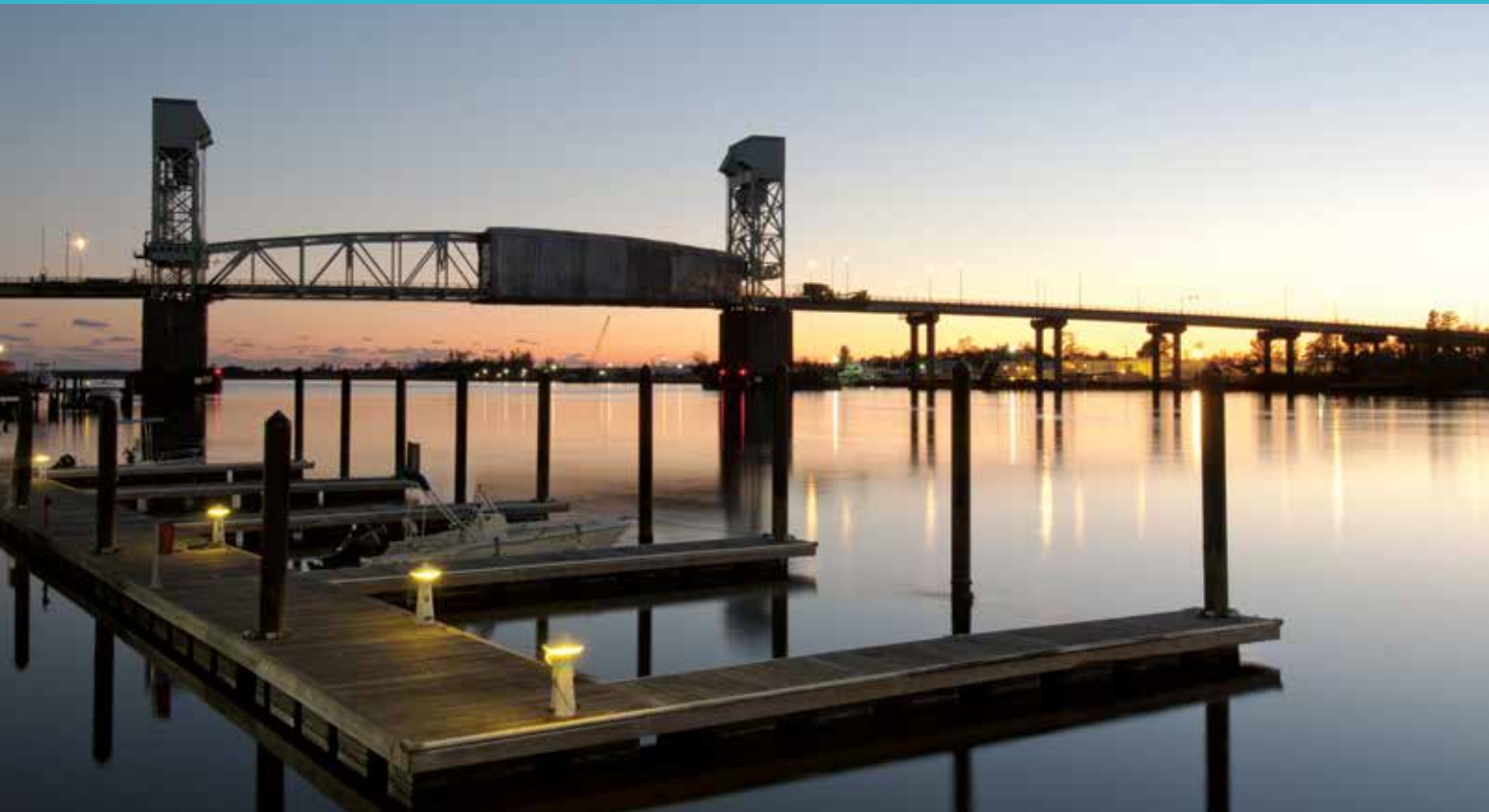
Richard Heins, regional vice president at United Way of Central Carolinas, and his colleagues are trying to expand the vision for that future. Throughout the past year, they’ve been holding community conversations—small gatherings to ask different community members important questions about their vision for the community and who can help bring about that vision.

Heins says that United Way knows “the only way to really make change in a community is to have it come from the ground; so we’re going to talk to people.” (A strategy, it is worth noting, that worked well for the Manufacturing Executive Roundtable.) And talk they have! The organization has talked with a broad spectrum of groups and individuals: United Way board members and volunteers; community agency employees and clients; parents and children; community shelter residents; business leaders; and students in the school system. Heins says they’ve heard about challenges related to affordable housing, transportation, enriching activities for young people, and getting from ideas to action. These kinds of conversations need to continue and expand, particularly to include the growing Latino population to ensure they are included in the leadership of collaboration and institutions, drawing on strengths they bring to the community and meeting needs unique to their transition.

Monroe’s leaders have proven their ability to plan for future physical infrastructure; now is the time to build on the engagement and commitments they already have to make the necessary system alignment to connect individuals to the opportunities for employment and advancement that abound in their community. As Heins says, “We have to be good listeners and then we’ve got to be good leaders. And if we say we’re going to do something, we’ve got to really do it.”

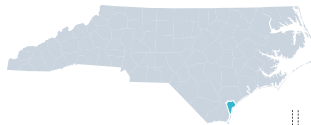
*“The only way to really make change in a community is to have it come from the ground; so we’re going to talk to people.”*

# GROWING TOGETHER: WILMINGTON



## THE PLACE:

A coastal city with a strong economy that draws both industry and retirees



**THE CHALLENGE:** Low-wage jobs contribute to stark income disparities, often along racial lines, among those who have access to economic security and those who do not

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** City leadership for a community-wide effort to improve access to education, affordable housing, and employment in historically marginalized neighborhoods

*North Carolina is home to several picturesque towns, but few have ended up in as many motion pictures as Wilmington.*

The city, which is bordered by the Cape Fear River to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, is home to three of the many beaches that make up more than 300 miles of coastal land in the state. The quaint downtown and proximity to water has made Wilmington and several of its beautiful communities the backdrop for Hollywood blockbusters, romantic thrillers, and television shows, including *Iron Man 3*, *Safe Haven*, and *Sleepy Hollow*. The town has become just as much of a character in film as the actors. In the movies, Wilmington exudes Southern charm. The relaxed nature of its fictional characters makes you think of a town of stylish boutiques, fishing boats, and a host of friendly residents with Southern drawls and warm smiles.

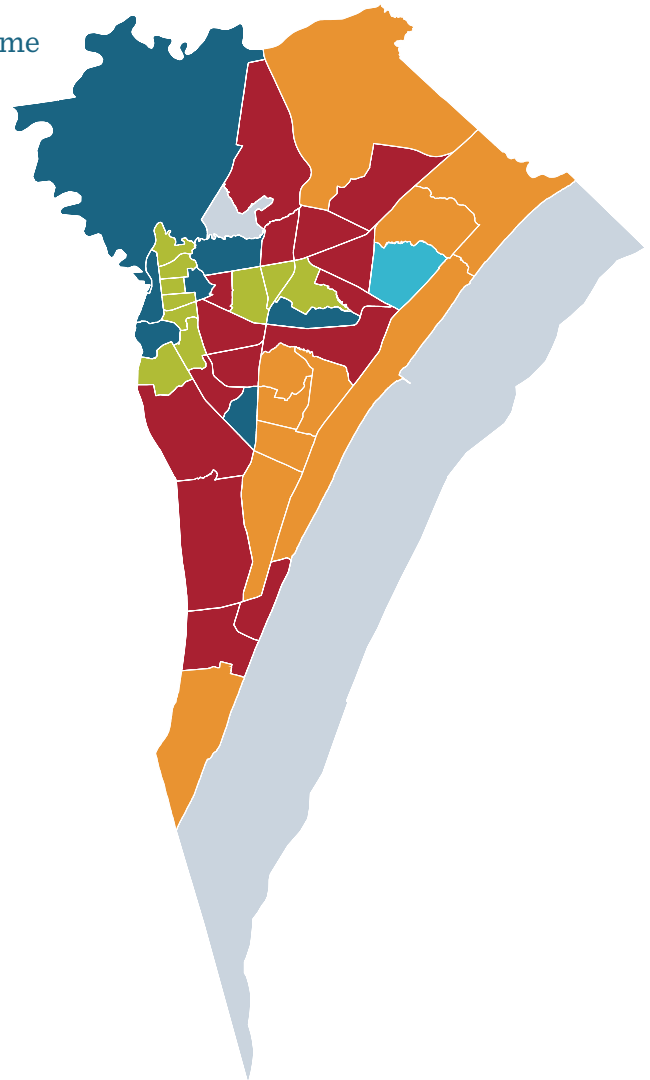
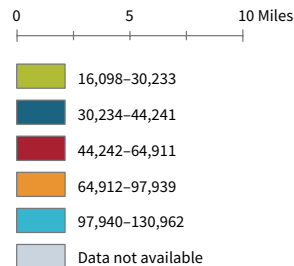
Many of these characteristics hold true off camera. However, Wilmington is more than the quintessential Southern city portrayed on film and television. In reality, the city has undergone huge population shifts that have created a bifurcated economy, often parsed along racial lines. These shifts have transformed a small town into a Southeastern industrial powerhouse that provides a vacation and retirement haven for some, while perpetuating a low-wage economy and intergenerational poverty for others.

### THE HISTORY: POPULATION SHIFTS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The first and most dismal of the population changes happened more than a century ago in the late 1800s; the shift occurred along racial lines, from predominantly African American to predominantly white. In 1880, 60 percent of the population was African American. By 1900, the African American portion of the population had dropped to 44 percent, with a sharp decline in the percentage of blacks in the city after 1910.<sup>1</sup> A century later, the demographic change in the city of Wilmington is more pronounced, with whites accounting for nearly 75 percent of the total population while blacks are just under 20 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup>

The precipice of the shift was the 1898 massacre of blacks in the streets of Wilmington. Remembered as one of the most violent overthrows of a local government in U.S. history, the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot fundamentally changed the city's trajectory. Just a few years before the massacre, blacks and whites both benefited from the local economy. Though the city was segregated, blacks held political office, thrived as business owners, and worked in a range of family-supporting jobs. After the brutal murders of 25 African Americans<sup>3</sup> and the banishment of thousands more from Wilmington during the subsequent days of the massacre, black businesses remaining in the city suffered. Black businesses were

### New Hanover County Median Household Income



dependent on black customers, who fled the city in masses. In addition, the change in leadership from one of tolerance to one of white supremacy, with laws that disenfranchised blacks, shifted the economic outcomes for multiple generations of blacks in the region. Black out-migration was exacerbated in the mid-twentieth century with the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North for job opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

The racial divide continues to this day, and blacks continue to be separated from the recent prosperity of New Hanover County. The income disparity between blacks and whites in the county is more than \$24,000, a gap larger than the state average of \$19,768.<sup>5</sup> Sonya Bennetone-Patrick of the N.C. Black Leadership Caucus emphasizes how multigenerational poverty, the history of racism in the county and surrounding areas, and the lack of access to wealth

<sup>1</sup> 1898 Wilmington Race Riot — *Final Report*, May 31, 2006 — <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/report/report.htm>, Chapter 8: <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/report/Chapter8.pdf>;

<sup>2</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, County Business Patterns, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits, Census of Governments; <sup>3</sup> The exact death toll is unknown, but reports put the death toll as high as 60. In addition, several African Americans went missing and were believed to have been murdered and their bodies dumped in the river. "1898 Race Riots," StarNews Online. <http://www.starnewsonline.com/section/topic37>;

<sup>4</sup> Wilmington demographics were also affected by the Great Migration of blacks to the north in the middle of the 19th century. However, this was not something that was unique to Wilmington;

<sup>5</sup> Data came from data table from 2nd Advisory Panel meeting



has introduced “racial barriers to success in the region.” Blacks continue to leave the city in search of better opportunities. In 2005, black residents surveyed by the U.S. Census Bureau in the American Community Survey cited the city’s job market, rising housing costs, lack of a social scene, and the history of racial tension as the top reasons they are leaving Wilmington for other areas.<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of a new highway towards the end of the 20th century complicated demographic and economic disparities in the city. “Really, the region started to explode after 1990 when I-40 was built,” remembers Bill Saffo, mayor of Wilmington. The city’s population has increased 47 percent since 2000.<sup>7</sup> Saffo has been mayor since 2006, during which time he has seen “a population

jobs in the state and local economy and generates \$12.9 billion in gross revenue<sup>9</sup>.

However, the appeal of the beaches to tourists and the baby boomer population has moved tourism and hospitality to the forefront of the economy of the city and the surrounding region. “Tourism plays a huge part of what is going on here. A lot of low-entry jobs,” says New Hanover County Schools Superintendent Tim Markley. Tourism jobs grew 30 percent between 2001 and 2014 and are estimated to grow another 8 percent over the next decade.<sup>10</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE: GROWTH ALONG WITH INCOME SEGREGATION

What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Wilmington Commuting Zone** (*Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, Pender*)

Lowest quintile	40%
Lower Middle Quintile	29%
Middle Quintile	17%
Upper Middle Quintile	9%
Highest Quintile	4%

explosion of retirees moving to the area because of the region’s medical facilities and the coast.” According to statistics cited by Saffo, the aging baby-boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) is nearly 25 percent of the city’s population now, second only to the number of millennials (persons born between 1982 and 1997), who make up 29 percent of population.

Growth in population has also spurred economic growth in the region. Wilmington, despite being in one of the smallest counties, by area, in North Carolina, is the economic hub for the southeastern region of the state. Cumulative job growth for New Hanover County surpassed 16 percent between 2000 and 2014. In comparison, job growth for the state of North Carolina was 7 percent for the same time period.<sup>8</sup> Significant job creation in the region can be attributed to the city’s geographic location and the in-migration of older adults to the region. Regional economic drivers include the transportation and logistics sector, health care and related research organizations, and the tourism and hospitality sectors. Easy access to the Intracoastal Waterway has made the Port of Wilmington an industrial powerhouse for the state. A 2014 economic impact study estimates that the Port of Wilmington supports more than 73,000

While population and economic growth in Wilmington has expanded the number of jobs in the city and surrounding region, job growth without a clear vision of how jobs are distributed throughout the economy, or without consideration of the types of jobs and associated wages that are being generated, can result in striking income disparities. The idea of a good job is one that has been talked about throughout a city whose growth has been determined by its natural resources and growth in retirees. A good job, according to several community members, is one that provides family-supporting wages, benefits (including paid sick leave), advancement potential, regular hours, and safe working conditions. According to Chris May, executive director of the Cape Fear Council of Governments, which oversees the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act programs for New Hanover and surrounding counties, “Everyone wants enough money to provide for their family, have time off, and afford something special once in a while.”

Good jobs for people without a postsecondary degree in the region include jobs at the state port, where someone can earn “\$40,000 to \$50,000 without a high school diploma,” says Chris May. May also lists the “residual jobs in the industries that support the port, like trucking” as good jobs that require minimal training and can support a family. For those able to attend the community college or UNC-Wilmington, May sees the healthcare sector as a way to connect to well-paying, entry-level employment in the area: “Someone in healthcare can earn 30 percent more money than in the tourism sector.” Nursing and other healthcare positions are in high demand in the region by the New Hanover Medical Center—one of the largest employers in the region—but also by the growing clinical research organizations (CRO). This demand has led UNC-Wilmington to create several academic programs and courses of study focused specifically on clinical research organizations. In fact, 100 percent of the UNC-Wilmington nursing graduates with a clinical research specialty are placed each year and the college continues to partner with employers to develop a pipeline of pathways for the CRO sector.

Good jobs, however, can be hard to come by when you are living in a tourism- and hospitality-dependent economy. Workers currently in the tourism and hospitality cluster have average annual earnings of \$21,003. More than half of the jobs in the tourism and

<sup>6</sup> Star Ledger — Blacks say there are fleeing Port City for cities with more to offer: <http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/20060927/NEWS/609270447>; <sup>7</sup> Profile of the City of Wilmington [http://www.wilmingtonnc.gov/Portals/0/documents/City%20Manager/2014\\_Wilmington\\_Profile.pdf](http://www.wilmingtonnc.gov/Portals/0/documents/City%20Manager/2014_Wilmington_Profile.pdf); <sup>8</sup> Source: Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. 2015.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed, data accessed November 16, 2015.; <sup>9</sup> “Economic Contribution of the North Carolina Ports,” North Carolina State Ports Authority, <http://www.ncports.com/elements/media/files/economic-contribution-north-carolina-ports.pdf>; <sup>10</sup> Tourism sector as defined by NC Commerce.



hospitality sector are in the hotel industry. The average annual earnings for a hotel worker for 2014 were \$19,092.<sup>11</sup> Workers in this sector are concentrated in the 25–54 age range and, therefore, likely to be out of college (or not in college) and trying to provide for their household, which often requires them to spend more time out of the house working multiple jobs just to get to the average weekly wage of \$829 (\$43,108 a year). “Wilmington is expensive, so it is tough to live on \$829 a week,” acknowledges Saffo as he laments the struggles of low-income families in the region.

Tourism and hospitality jobs in the region also typically do not require postsecondary training or a degree. The typical entry-level educational requirement for Wilmington workers in this sector is a high school diploma or equivalent, thus conflating a low-wage environment with an environment that does not typically value education. Doing so further exacerbates income disparities in the city and increases the number of residents that are not benefiting from the economic expansion of the city.

The population shift and growth in low-wage, lower-skilled employment has further concentrated neighborhood poverty in the city over the last two decades. The influx of wealthy residents—primarily a white, older population—increased property values and reduced the incentive to build affordable housing in the city. “Wilmington is racially segregated by income, and affordable housing is scarce in the region,” says Connie Majure-Rhett, president and CEO of the Wilmington Chamber of

*Job growth without a clear vision of how jobs are distributed throughout the economy, or without consideration of the types of jobs and associated wages that are being generated, can result in striking income disparities.*

Commerce. The percentage of people of color living in under-resourced, poverty-stricken neighborhoods within the city has increased dramatically: The percentage of people of color living in under-resourced, poverty-stricken neighborhoods within the city has increased dramatically. Studies show that people living in poverty lack access to resources and the infrastructure of economic and social success. Research from PolicyLink reports that blacks in the Wilmington area are more likely to live in poverty than their white counterparts: Blacks living in poverty increased 10 percent from 2000 to 2012 in the region, with 17.7 percent of blacks living in poverty in 2012 versus 3.2 percent of whites.<sup>12</sup>

City leadership has a good sense of the pressures the region’s significant growth has placed on low-income families. Growth in Wilmington has created a dichotomous society and such can be seen in impoverished neighborhoods, like the Northside neighborhood in downtown Wilmington. One community leader notes that “the downside of the growth is the uptick in crime and the increase in gangs.” Not a new finding, as research has continuously found that

## Southeast: New Hanover County

**Population (2014, est.)** 216,298

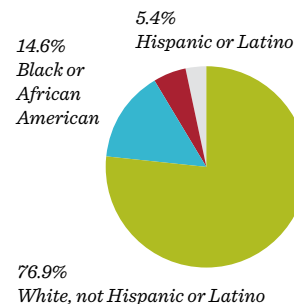
Population growth (2010–2014) 6.7%

Job growth (2010–2014) 11.7%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 12.9%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 58.7%

Unemployment rate, 2014 10.0%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

increased income inequality and greater segregation by income correlates with increased crime rates in regions.<sup>13</sup>

Northside is emblematic of a community disconnected from the economic expansion of Wilmington. Northside is a predominantly African-American neighborhood that sits just past the city’s central business district. “Population growth tends to happen towards the edges of the county, outside of the downtown area,” notes Tim Markley, New Hanover Schools Superintendent. Northside has been struggling for years with the symptoms many communities face when disconnected from the growing affluence of the broader community, including increased poverty, crime, and unemployment. The neighborhood has slightly less than 1,600 residents; 55 percent live in poverty. Per capita income in Northside is \$12,295.<sup>14</sup> The high school dropout rate in Northside is greater than 50 percent. Northside is not the part of Wilmington that Hollywood depicts with such nostalgia; it is a community struggling to keep its residents connected to educational and employment opportunities.

Communities like Northside operate in such a deficit of resources that leaders have to address economic security and physical safety before building an Infrastructure of opportunity to link to the anchors of growth in the region.

### THE STRATEGY: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

“You can reduce gang affiliation and lower crime rates by providing more job opportunities for people,” says Sonya Bennetone-Patrick.

The increase in crime and gang violence is not seen as the problem by community leaders, but more a symptom of a systemic problem—the lack of an infrastructure that connects disadvantaged neighborhoods to the economic expansion. Leaders from the faith-based community, private businesses, local nonprofits, and elected officials have joined together in a community-wide approach to examine the absence of resources and opportunities in Wilmington’s low-wealth communities. The leaders, who operate as the “Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Violence,” are working to solve the root causes of neighborhood

<sup>11</sup> EMSI data access November 16, 2015; <sup>12</sup> PolicyLink National Equity Atlas Indicators: Neighborhood Poverty. [http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood\\_poverty](http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood_poverty);

<sup>13</sup> Levitt, Stephen D. 1999. “The Changing Relationship between Income and Crime Victimization” FRBNY Economic Policy Review: 87–98; <sup>14</sup> “New Hanover County Blue Ribbon Commission On the Prevention of Youth Violence,” United Way of the Cape Fear Area. <http://www.nhcs.net/superintendent/EquityAdvisory/BlueRibbonCommission.pdf>



deterioration. The vision the commission has set for the city is to decrease crime, increase graduation rates, and create a “bright future for children” in Wilmington<sup>15</sup>.

The commission is a task force charged with coordinating resources, aligning and leveraging funding, and ensuring accountability by monitoring and evaluating progress along the way for the entire community to combat the symptoms of poverty and economic exclusion. The target population of the commission is youth, ages 0–24, and their families. However, the commission and staff are hyper-focused on youth ages 0–12.

To start, the commission conducted an assessment of the underlying issues related to food insecurity, increase in school dropouts, and gang violence. In addition, they conducted a scan of community resources and organizations that currently were working to alleviate poverty. The focus is on the communities on the north side of downtown, Snipes Elementary, and D.C. Virgo Middle School; the Commission has named this area the “Youth Enrichment Zone.” The goal of this community-wide collaboration is to improve the economic and educational outcomes of families by targeting the systemic weaknesses in the ladders to success that many who have “made it” take for granted. Modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone, the family resource coordinators from the Youth Enrichment Zone (YEZ) are going door-to-door to assess the needs of families and kids and connect them to services in the community or make referrals to outside organizations. The YEZ coordinates more than 35 organizations throughout the city and assists families in applying for and receiving services. The commission also has developed a strategic plan to institute dropout prevention strategies, increase graduation rates, reduce suspensions, and connect students in the YEZ to employment and summer enrichment programs to counteract negative influences still prevalent in their community. Saffo believes the commission can change the outcomes for children and their families in the city “if we focus on the communities most in need, identify the people that need the resources, identify the specific resources, bring together the resources that treat these issues, monitor and evaluate the program.”

*“Prevention is not enough to change the outcomes of low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods.”*

Frankie Roberts, executive director of the Leading Into New Communities (LINC) program in Wilmington and a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission Youth Violence Action Team, believes more can be done to remove the systemic barriers to black achievement. For one, he feels “Wilmington residents do not have relationships across cultural and socioeconomic lines, and this breeds bias [towards blacks], especially in the school system.” What Roberts would like to see is more effort from local government to “create environments in schools that are African-American focused” partially by weaving African-American culture and history into curriculum lessons throughout the year, as well as actively recruiting black, male teachers.

However, Roberts believes “prevention is not enough to change the outcomes of low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods.” High on his list is to create training programs and employment opportunities for LINC’s participants. LINC specializes in strategies, case management, and programs for formerly incarcerated individuals with a gang affiliation to help them transition back into the community and reduce recidivism. The mayor is a fan of LINC and other organizations that try to help people with a criminal record get jobs. He notes that without a rehabilitation plan in the prison system, people need jobs when they get out or they are likely to be “re-incarcerated within 36 months.” Studies show that connecting formerly incarcerated individuals to employment can help to reduce crime rates.<sup>16</sup> As of 2014, Frankie Roberts estimates about 1,600 men and women completed the LINC reentry program. In the last decade, 88 percent of LINC participants have remained out of prison, according to Roberts.<sup>17</sup>

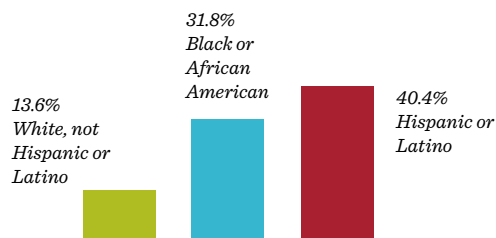
Frankie Roberts places his participants in jobs that pay about \$30,000 or more a year. He thinks the pay is reasonable because LINC is subsidizing some of the salary. In Wilmington, a community

<sup>15</sup> Youth zone in Northside neighborhood offers crime alternatives — <http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/20100421/articles/100429930>; <sup>16</sup> “Crime and Work: What can we learn from the low-wage labor market,” Ellen Houston and Jared Bernstein, 2000 [http://www.epi.org/publication/books\\_crimeandwork](http://www.epi.org/publication/books_crimeandwork); <sup>17</sup> “LINC to farming: sowing and reaping,” K.J. Williams, *Lumina News*, March 2015. <http://luminanews.com/2015/03/linc-to-farming-sowing-and-reaping>

## Equity Indicators: New Hanover County

### Poverty rate

18.1%

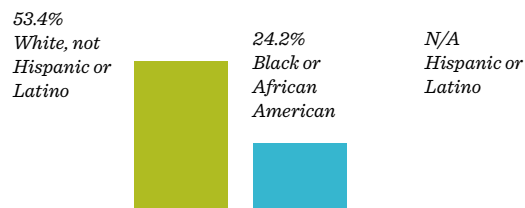


Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$22.14 (\$46,059)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	27%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$48,005

### Postsecondary educational attainment (25+), 2014\*

Total Population

48.1%



### Median household income (in 2014 dollars)

Population	\$49,582
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$54,058
Black or African American	\$29,184
Hispanic or Latino	\$31,875

\*Associate's degree or higher

dependent on tourism, jobs often pay far less than \$30,000, lack benefits, and are typically seasonal.

### NEXT STEPS: GROWTH DOESN'T HAVE TO BE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Although growth in the Wilmington region has exacerbated racial and income segregation and created a low-wage environment that makes getting ahead more difficult for people with multiple barriers to success, there are ways to create pathways to economic opportunity. Inclusive economic growth, where affordable housing, jobs, and community resources are the core tenets of an equitable economic development strategy, can reduce income disparities and racial segregation in the city. Wilmington's Blue Ribbon Commission and the Youth Enrichment Zone are steps in the right direction to connect families in poverty to social services and organizations that can help them achieve short-term economic stability. Long-term strategies for equitable economic and workforce development incorporate systemic change and consider how people in poverty are represented by and connected to the institutions that are meant to serve them. Shifting the focus from the provision of services and programs to marginalized groups to the engagement of underrepresented community members in leadership, as Wilmington is doing in the YEZ, helps build a community where everyone prospers.

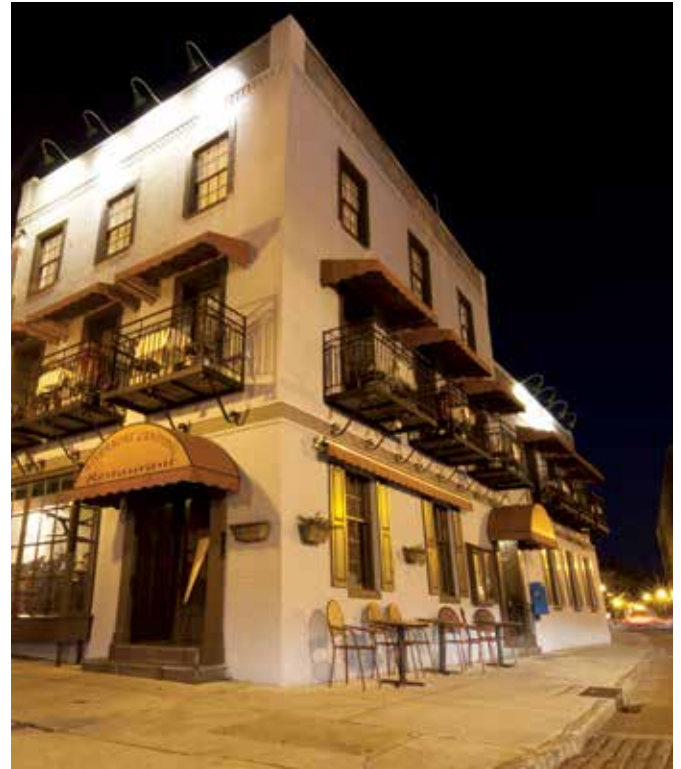
The region still needs to think of ways people from under-

resourced areas in the region can connect to and train for good jobs in the economic anchors of the region (the Port of Wilmington and the healthcare industry) while still being able to take care of their families, manage transportation, and meet child care responsibilities. Chris May says there has been discussion among the workforce community on "how to take the training to people instead of making them commute to the college. And for those who do commute to the college, can we provide childcare while they learn?" Fostering collaborative efforts to build an infrastructure of opportunity that connects people to education and family-supporting wage employment is a good bet for the city. A more inclusive Wilmington comes closer to the version of the city seen in the movies, with sustained and equitable economic outcomes for all of its residents.

*Inclusive economic growth, where affordable housing, jobs, and community resources are the core tenets of an equitable economic development strategy, can reduce income disparities and racial segregation in the city.*

<sup>11</sup> EMSI data access November 16, 2015; <sup>12</sup> PolicyLink National Equity Atlas Indicators: Neighborhood Poverty. [http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood\\_poverty](http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood_poverty);

<sup>13</sup> Levitt, Stephen D. 1999. "The Changing Relationship between Income and Crime Victimization" FRBNY Economic Policy Review: 87-98; <sup>14</sup> "New Hanover County Blue Ribbon Commission On the Prevention of Youth Violence," United Way of the Cape Fear Area. <http://www.nhcs.net/superintendent/EquityAdvisory/BlueRibbonCommission.pdf>



## Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024

*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$22.14*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,401	1,604	203	14%	\$48.59	Bachelor's degree
29-1141	Registered Nurses	2,578	2,779	201	8%	\$28.70	Associate's degree
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	668	867	199	30%	\$24.55	High school diploma or equivalent
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	1,116	1,301	185	17%	\$22.79	High school diploma or equivalent
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	1,568	1,749	181	12%	\$30.86	Doctoral or professional degree
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	734	871	137	19%	\$29.59	Bachelor's degree
13-1111	Management Analysts	311	423	112	36%	\$31.88	Bachelor's degree
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	1,003	1,108	105	10%	\$24.61	High school diploma or equivalent
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	193	291	98	51%	\$22.96	Bachelor's degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	486	584	98	20%	\$31.27	High school diploma or equivalent

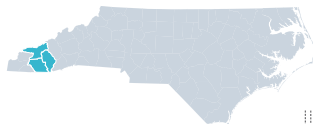


# LANDSCAPE DEFINES OPPORTUNITY: WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA



## THE PLACE:

A region that comprises three rural counties and the Qualla Boundary, where the physical landscape is both asset and challenge to economic development and connection to the rest of the state



**THE CHALLENGE:** Developing an entrepreneurial economy that creates local opportunity for local people to build wealth in the area

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Two- and four-year educational institutions that collaborate with local government and tribal leadership to develop a regional response to regional challenges; philanthropy committed to building capacity of community-based organizations

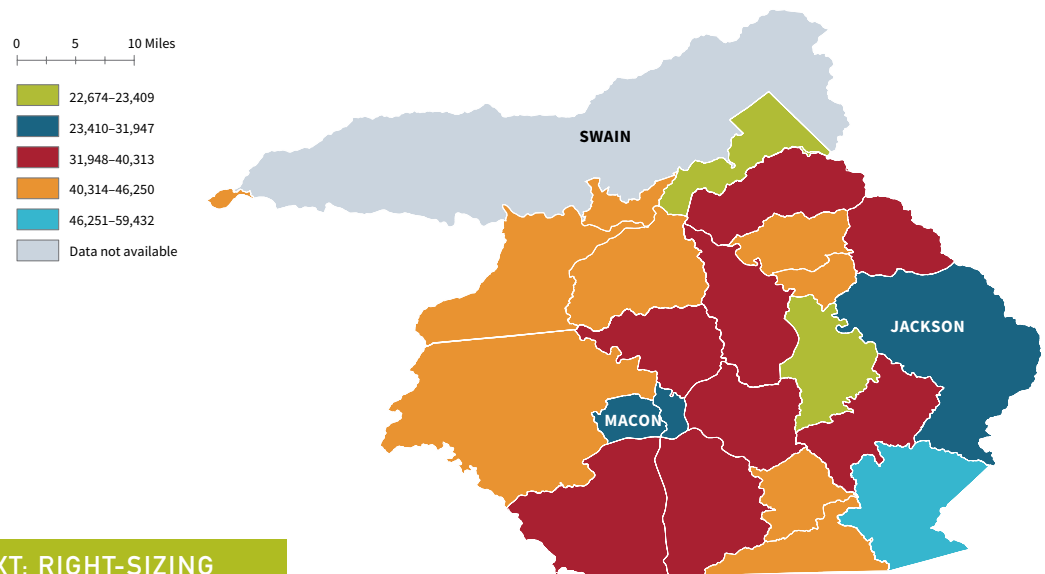
*No one can deny the splendor of fall in the Western North Carolina mountains, nor the dominance of Asheville in what most people think of as “Western North Carolina.” But beyond Buncombe County, you’ll find Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties, what Ryan Sherby, executive director of the Southwestern Commission, the region’s council of government, describes as the “heart of the region.”*

These three counties hold more than fall color: Jackson is home to Western Carolina University, the region’s only public comprehensive university; Macon is the region’s gateway to Atlanta; and Swain shares the Great Smoky Mountains National Park with Sevier County, Tenn.



And, particularly unique to the region, there's the sovereign Qualla Boundary, home to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation. The three-county region has fashioned tourism as an economic powerhouse, accounting for 5,000 jobs and more than \$100 million in payroll.<sup>1</sup> Yet many of these tourism jobs do not pay a family-supporting wage, so a key challenge for community leaders is diversifying and expanding the economy so that it works for all of their residents.

## Jackson, Swain, and Macon Counties Median Household Income



### HISTORY AND CONTEXT: RIGHT-SIZING

Significant tourism in the region began in the 1930s with the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. But the economy isn't just tourism. Throughout the 1950s, economic development in Western North Carolina was based on natural resources (timber, agriculture, and mining) and low-wage, low-skill factory jobs. In the 1960s and 1970s, Western North Carolina benefited from a hot housing market, a good economy, and high land prices. Residents found jobs in manufacturing and farming and, when people from all over the East Coast began to build second homes in the North Carolina mountains, construction workers from all over the South moved to the region to find work.<sup>2</sup> Construction remained a driving force in the region through the 2000s. Today, between 70 and 80 percent of houses in Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties are seasonal homes.<sup>3</sup>

The gaming industry was a real gamechanger for the Tribe and the regional economy. In 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act gave tribes all over the United States the right to open casinos. The Eastern Band did not move immediately; they waited to see how other tribes fared first. Joyce Dugan, principal chief of the Eastern Band from 1995 to 1999 says, "There were a lot of concerns about how the casino would change the community and our people." In 1997, they put those fears aside and joined the gaming industry, changing the Tribe forever. That first year, they cleared \$50 million after expenses.

Things remained stable in the region through the first decade of the 2000s. "Then, in 2009, it was like someone turned the light off," says Tommy Jenkins, economic development director for Macon County. Between 2001 and 2010, Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties lost half of their construction and manufacturing jobs and farm employment dropped by 20 percent.<sup>4</sup> Other sectors also experienced significant declines in jobs, including retail and transportation.

"After the recession, we became lean again," says Jenkins. Many of the people who moved to Western North Carolina to join the thriving construction economy ended up leaving during the economic downturn. Between 2000 and 2010, the Western North Carolina region's population declined by nearly 11 percent.<sup>5</sup> Now, almost five years after the recession, leaders are reassessing the region's economic prospects. "Things are starting to look up," says Sherby. "We are not getting such a huge influx of people moving here anymore. That type of growth was unsustainable. We are right-sizing."

This "right-sized" region includes disparate populations. Melissa Wargo, chief of staff at Western Carolina University (WCU), sees five economic groups in the area:

- The mountain poor families: community members dealing with generations of poverty and not a lot of opportunity for upward mobility.
- The Cherokee Nation: citizens making inroads in prosperity, especially with gaming investments, but still a high poverty rate and incidence of health issues.
- The traditional middle class: mid-level professionals, like teachers, nurses, public services workers, and university staff.
- High-wealth: typically living in affluent pockets, like the Cashiers/Highlands areas of southern Jackson and Macon counties; this group includes those with second and third homes in the region.
- The Entrepreneurs: people who move to the region for quality of life considerations. As Wargo says, these are "young people who don't want to be tied to an office. They want to run their own businesses."

<sup>1</sup> "Travel Economic Impact Model," North Carolina Department of Commerce. <https://www.nccommerce.com/tourism/research/economic-impact/teim/>; <sup>2</sup> "North Carolina Resorts," North Carolina History Project. <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/722/entry/>; <sup>3</sup> UNC Asheville National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center. (2013). "Western North Carolina Vitality Index."; <sup>4</sup> Brennan, K., Cooper, C., and Ha, I. (2014). "Western North Carolina Regional Outlook Report 2014."; <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

A look at housing in Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties shows the distinctions between poverty and wealth in the region. While the majority of homes in the three-county region are for seasonal use, over half of the region's residents cannot support basic rent in their region. According to a 2012 report studying affordable housing, "the average renter in the region needs an additional \$191 in income each month to afford a two-bedroom fair market rent apartment. This is not sustainable, and with rising energy costs linked to utilities and transportation, the situation is becoming more untenable."<sup>6</sup>

### *The Casino Impact*

Harrah's Cherokee Hotel and Casino created an overflow of economic opportunities for the region. In 2009, the economic impact on Jackson and Swain counties was estimated to be \$300 million; more than three million people visit the casino each year.<sup>7</sup> Hotels and restaurants that were once only open in the summer and fall began to stay open year-round. Before gaming, unemployment in the region would reach 17 percent in the winter. Now, the winter unemployment rate is on par with the state, around 5 percent. In 2013, casino revenues reached over \$500 million and employed more than 3,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

Profits from the casino are shared with the 15,000-member Eastern Band community in two ways. The first is through the Cherokee Preservation Foundation. For tribal-run casinos in many other states, a percentage of profits are required to be shared with the state government. But when former North

Carolina Governor Jim Hunt gave approval for the casino development, he decided to do something different. While some profits still go to the state, "Governor Hunt wanted to make sure that most of the funds went to the Qualla Boundary and this region," says Dan Martin, a program officer at the Cherokee Preservation Foundation. "So, the casino funds come to our foundation to fund grants in cultural preservation, economic and workforce development, and the environment."

Profits are also shared with tribal members through per capita payments. Each year, members of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation receive two checks, based on casino profits. For children, per capita payments are held until they turn 18 and then, after some financial planning, they are given a lump sum payment. In 2015, the lump sum payment was almost \$175,000.

### THE CHALLENGE: THE OPPORTUNITY TO STAY AND THRIVE

While the mountains bring tourists to the area, and with them those 5,000 tourism jobs, they hinder other industries from moving to the region. Many Southern communities try to recruit big automotive or other advanced manufacturing companies to their regions. "But with scarce flat land, we have to think strategically about how we bring in new business," says Ryan Sherby of the Southwestern Commission.

Just looking at a map of North Carolina does not provide a clear picture of how isolated this region is from the rest of the state. "We are closer to five other state capitals than we are to Raleigh," says Melissa Wargo, chief of staff at Western Carolina University. "There is very little connection between this part of the state and the rest of the state. That colors how people draw business and industry." Tommy Jenkins agrees: "We see Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia, as our markets."

*"With scarce flat land, we have to think strategically about how we bring in new business."*

Along with declining population growth, the region is challenged by high poverty rates. Between 2000 and 2010, poverty rates increased by 7 percent in Macon and 4 percent in Jackson, while remaining fairly stable in Swain; and all three counties' rates are higher than the statewide average.<sup>9</sup> Swain is on the Appalachian Regional Commission's list of designated distressed counties. Carol Burton, associate provost for undergraduate studies at WCU, describes the region as having "pockets of depressed living." The region also deals with "brain drain," like other rural parts of North Carolina. According to Wargo, "The majority of our graduates don't stay here. The ones who stay head to Asheville or other metro areas where the jobs are." Jenkins adds, "A lot of our best and brightest want to stay here but they don't see the opportunity. Our challenge is to provide them with the opportunity to stay."

What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

#### Sylva Commuting Zone (Graham, Jackson, Swain)

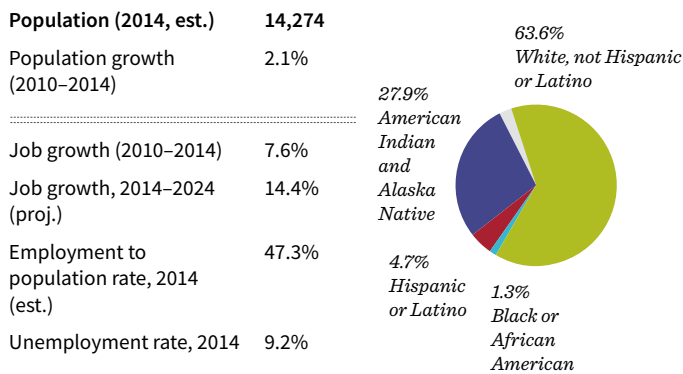
Lowest quintile	33%
Lower Middle Quintile	27%
Middle Quintile	21%
Upper Middle Quintile	13%
Highest Quintile	6%

#### Franklin Commuting Zone (Macon)

Lowest quintile	34%
Lower Middle Quintile	30%
Middle Quintile	18%
Upper Middle Quintile	13%
Highest Quintile	6%

<sup>6</sup> UNC Asheville National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center; <sup>7</sup> Johnson, J., Kasarda, J., and Appold, S. (2011). "Assessing the Economic and Non-Economic Impacts of Harrah's Cherokee Casino, North Carolina."; <sup>8</sup> "New casino games fuel growth in Cherokee, even as potential for gambling competition looms," John Frank and Rick Rothacker, *The News & Observer*, August 2014. <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/state-politics/article10038947.html>; <sup>9</sup> Brennan, Cooper, and Ha.

## Western Region: Swain County



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

### THE STRATEGY: REGIONAL THINKING, REGIONAL ACCESS

#### Regional Thinking

Because people commute to jobs across county lines, it is hard for any of these counties to develop an economic strategy without thinking about how it intersects with its neighbors. Research shows that the individual counties on their own aren't large enough to attract industry and business for a singular market within a county line.<sup>10</sup> Regional thinking, then, is a must and it is nothing new to this area. Advantage West used to be the anchor organization that led regional economic development efforts for Western North Carolina, but it closed in 2015 when the state defunded regional economic development partnerships. Tommy Jenkins says, "There was a hole in economic development when Advantage West closed." The area needed another organization to pick up where Advantage West left off. That's when the Southwestern Commission stepped up. The commission "assists and provides technical support for local governments within the region, ensuring that they partner with one another toward regional goals."<sup>11</sup> Ryan Sherby says, "We are the trust broker, the consistency in the region."

Sherby and his staff spoke with employers, local college administrators, and other community leaders and decided that a marketing strategy was needed to grow economic opportunity in the region. And since they don't have the land to go after the next big manufacturing plant, their response focuses on entrepreneurship. "This area is attractive to entrepreneurs because of our quality of life and the access to so many outdoor activities and adventures. We're going to give entrepreneurs everything they need to succeed here," says Sherby. They decided to create a regional virtual collaborative, mapping the area's entrepreneurship resources to provide a one-stop shop for anyone who wants to start their own business. The Tribe thinks entrepreneurship is in the best interest of their youth as well. "We encourage our young adults to

## Equity Indicators: Swain County

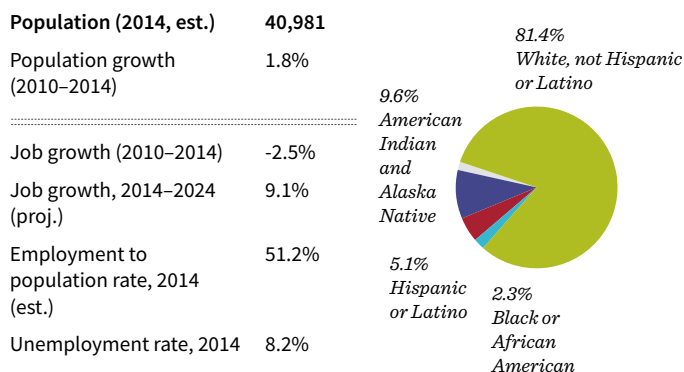
<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>27.7%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	17.3%
Black or African American	100.0%
Hispanic or Latino	14.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	46.4%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$34,632</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$42,162
Black or African American	N/A
Hispanic or Latino	\$83,000
American Indian and Alaska Native	\$18,854
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.53 (\$44,792)
Jobs Paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	15.2%
Average Earnings Per Job, 2015	\$42,419
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total Population, 2010–2014*</b>	<b>15.3%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	16.7%
Black or African American	0.0%
Hispanic or Latino	12.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native	9.4%

*\*Educational attainment by race/ethnicity for Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties does not include persons with associate's degrees*



<sup>10</sup> According to the Southwestern Commission website, "experts in site location and business attraction have indicated that the Qualla Boundary and individual counties of western North Carolina are too small (as markets and destinations) to be able to effectively target and attract businesses on their own"; <sup>11</sup> Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission, <http://www.regiona.org>

## Western Region: Jackson County



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.



## Equity Indicators: Jackson County

<b>Poverty rate</b>	<b>22.3%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	18.2%
Black or African American	66.5%
Hispanic or Latino	69.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	27.8%
<b>Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014</b>	<b>\$36,705</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$38,533
Black or African American	\$17,328
Hispanic or Latino	\$17,174
American Indian and Alaska Native	\$30,789
Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.18 (\$44,060)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	16.2%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$38,407
<b>Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total Population, 2010–2014*</b>	<b>29.3%</b>
White, not Hispanic or Latino	31.7%
Black or African American	15.2%
Hispanic or Latino	8.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native	14.9%

*\*Educational attainment by race/ethnicity for Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties does not include persons with associate's degrees*

use their per capita payments to start their own businesses,” says Martin. “We are educating them about the benefits of creating their own jobs.” Recent research has shown that entrepreneurship development is a plausible development strategy in rural areas and could “enable economically disadvantaged communities to reverse stagnant economic conditions by creating wealth and jobs through locally owned businesses.”<sup>12</sup>

This regional thinking does not stop with the Southwest Commission and economic developers. The Tribe and local colleges also are thinking about regionalism and how their successes can benefit the entire region. The Tribe is partnering with the Southwestern Commission to understand how it can work with all counties in the region. “We want to share the benefits of our work with the region,” says Martin. “We want prosperity beyond the Qualla Boundary.”

For the colleges in the area, regional thinking is part of their mission. According to Don Tomas, president of Southwestern Community College in Sylva, “Counties may have their own best interest at heart, but SCC is working with the Southwestern Commission to build a regional collaboration. We want to start at the grassroots level and filter up the success.”

<sup>12</sup> “Rural Community Economic Development: Experiences from the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions.” Ed., Robinson, K., Christy, R., and Baharanyi, N.





In the past five years, Western Carolina University has taken its stated mission to “improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in Western Carolina and beyond” to heart.<sup>13</sup> Wargo describes WCU’s recent shift in focus this way: “WCU has done a 180-degree turn in a recommitment to the region and helping to develop prosperity. We want to improve economic development and opportunity in the region.” WCU has implemented several regional development strategies, including WCU/external partner-collaborative research and an annual conference for regional leaders to discuss economic development efforts. Each year WCU hosts a leadership tour of the Western North Carolina region to “reinforce WCU’s connection with its external constituents and to update University leadership consistently about regional and local priorities.”<sup>14</sup> According to Sherby, “the commission/WCU relationship has grown because we all understand the need for collaboration.”

#### *Expanding Educational Access to the Region*

Driving 10 miles through the mountains takes a lot longer than driving 10 miles in other rural areas. This requires educators to think differently about how to deliver postsecondary

opportunities. “Access to higher education is a challenge for many,” says Carol Burton, associate provost for undergraduate studies at WCU.

WCU is trying to increase educational access in the region, especially for those with limited opportunities. “We want to break down the barriers,” says Burton. “We were created to bring education to this part of the state. We were created with an access mission. We care about making a difference in the lives of students in this region.”

WCU has placed a particular emphasis on helping first-generation and low-income students. Chief of Staff Wargo says, “There are first-generation college student families who can’t cover the costs of attending college. We want to provide access for those who are prepared but don’t have the means. We have an obligation to provide that to these families.”

They are doing this through programs like “Telling Our Story,” an opportunity for first-generation and low-income students to share their life’s stories with Chancellor David Belcher, the WCU Board of Trustees, and donors. “When you hear them talk about how they’ve made it this far and how they want to stay in school but need the financial support, people are willing to support them,” says Burton.

<sup>13</sup> Western Carolina University. “2020 Vision: Focusing our Future.”; <sup>14</sup> Ibid.



## Western Region: Macon County

**Population (2014, est.)** 33,875

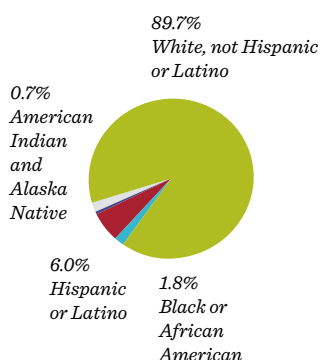
Population growth  
(2010–2014) -0.1%

Job growth (2010–2014) -4.9%

Job growth, 2014–2024  
(proj.) 8.0%

Employment to  
population rate, 2014  
(est.) 45.4%

Unemployment rate, 2014 9.5%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

*“We want to break down the barriers,” says Burton. “We were created to bring education to this part of the state. We were created with an access mission. We care about making a difference in the lives of students in this region.”*

“We are celebrating those who have struggled to succeed.”

In order for North Carolina to meet the needs of employers, colleges must look further than students attending college for the first time. WCU is addressing this in their workforce development efforts. “The UNC strategic plan estimates that 36 percent of jobs of the future will require a bachelor’s degree or higher. If the UNC system concentrated solely on educating traditional North Carolina high school seniors, it would still not get us to 36 percent,” says Wargo. “We have to think about how to help adults without degrees, the ‘partway home’ students. We have to think strategically about how to provide an economic backbone and workforce for the region.”

That strategic thinking also includes listening to the community. When Chancellor David Belcher started at WCU in 2011, he went on a listening tour of the region and created a steering committee of college administrators, local community leaders, and employers. The committee went to communities all over the region to talk to residents about their needs. From this listening tour, WCU created a plan focused on economic development, academic excellence, and community engagement, *2020 Vision: Focusing our Future*. Six strategic directions are explained in this plan, including the fulfillment of the educational needs of the state and the region: “WCU seeks to ensure educational opportunities that result in graduates who are prepared for success, who are ready to compete in a challenging, changing, and global environment, and who

## Equity Indicators: Macon County

**Poverty rate** 20.7%

White, not Hispanic or Latino 18.7%

Black or African American 13.2%

Hispanic or Latino 48.1%

American Indian and Alaska Native 13.5%

**Median household income (in 2014 dollars), 2010–2014** \$38,491

White, not Hispanic or Latino \$38,785

Black or African American N/A

Hispanic or Latino \$34,625

American Indian and Alaska Native N/A

Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014 \$21.43 (\$44,581)

Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014 15.5%

Average earnings per job, 2015 \$40,935

**Postsecondary educational attainment (25+) Total Population, 2010–2014\*** 22.4%

White, not Hispanic or Latino 22.7%

Black or African American 22.0%

Hispanic or Latino 16.7%

American Indian and Alaska Native 0.0%

*\*Educational attainment by race/ethnicity for Swain, Jackson, and Macon counties does not include persons with associate’s degrees*

are committed to contributing to the intellectual, cultural, and economic development of our region and state.”<sup>15</sup>

The strategic plan also included revamping program offerings. The university underwent a faculty-led, transparent program prioritization effort that led to the elimination of some programs and more investment in others. “We fine-tuned our curriculum to reflect what industry, education, healthcare, and nonprofits said they need from our graduates.”

The university also wants to meet the needs of the Tribe. According to former Eastern Band Principal Chief Dugan, “Most of our students go to WCU because of the accessibility. WCU’s objective is to be a regional force.”

With the Tribe’s focus on educational access, the relationship between WCU and the Tribe is a natural fit. Dugan says, “The Tribe has always valued education. Even at our poorest, we would give our last dollar to higher education.”

All Eastern Band citizens who want to go to college are provided funding for tuition and books. Tribe college students also are provided additional incentives based on GPA. Although college funding is taken care of, retention is still a concern. According

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

## Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024 Swain, Macon, and Jackson Counties

*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$21.53 (Swain), \$21.43 (Macon), \$21.18 (Jackson)*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
29-1141	Registered Nurses	608	709	101	17%	\$27.40	Associate's degree
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	809	907	98	12%	\$28.58	Doctoral or professional degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	315	373	58	18%	\$37.14	Bachelor's degree
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	227	262	35	15%	\$21.88	Bachelor's degree
15-1132	Software Developers, Applications	78	104	26	33%	\$29.72	Bachelor's degree
13-1111	Management Analysts	66	86	20	30%	\$27.66	Bachelor's degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	118	138	20	17%	\$21.50	High school diploma or equivalent
15-1121	Computer Systems Analysts	58	78	20	34%	\$23.94	Bachelor's degree
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	98	118	20	20%	\$22.97	Postsecondary non-degree award
37-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Landscaping, Lawn Service, and Groundskeeping Workers	109	128	19	17%	\$22.16	High school diploma or equivalent

to Beverly Payne, assistant superintendent of Cherokee Central Schools, “Our students are used to having relationships with their teachers and then suddenly they don’t have that. Our school system and higher education program have developed programs to ease that transition.”

The Eastern Band would like students to return home after college graduation. “It is important to us that you come back and serve, that you help your people,” says Dugan. So they are helping students see all the different career options available on the reservation. “Many people within the Tribe have different careers,” says Dugan. “We have more than just doctors and lawyers. We have a museum. We need anthropologists and archaeologists. We need people to come back and manage the Tribe effectively and efficiently.”

Dugan is concerned about the health of the Tribe, but she’s also concerned about the happiness of their youth. When explaining the difference between a job and a career, Dugan says, “A job implies that it’s just a place you go to make a living. A career is something you do because you like it and want to do it. We want our youth to find success in careers they love. We want them to be inspired.”

### NEXT STEPS: STABILITY TO GROW

Western North Carolina leaders know where their strengths lie—in people who care about each other, the beautiful mountains, and

educational and economic organizations working toward regional growth—while also acknowledging the reality of remoteness and lack of flat land. This acknowledgement leads to innovative thinking to expand educational access and entrepreneurial opportunities that requires working together. This economic structure, strengthened by regional development strategies, a common vision, and collaborative efforts, could potentially lead to upward mobility in this rural area.

Western Carolina University, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, and the Southwestern Commission understand that the educational and economic health of the region requires strong relationships between all three entities. And while the players sometimes change due to administrative transitions or tribal elections, Sherby believes they can “transcend politics to grow and stabilize workforce and economic development efforts in the region.”

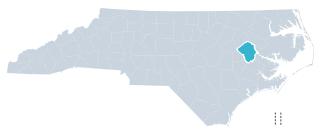
*In their isolated region, there is a sense of community. It’s a community that cares about its residents trying to get ahead. And the community has adopted the Cherokee belief: “We take care of our own.”*

# GROWTH THAT BENEFITS ALL: PITT COUNTY



## THE PLACE:

A county in North Carolina's Black Belt with strong educational institutions and a rebounding economy poised for more growth in the health science sector



**THE CHALLENGE:** Access to opportunity for rural and low-wealth residents is impeded by educational inequities and limited transportation options; there is danger of economic growth being concentrated in one sector

## ELEMENTS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Secondary, two-, and four-year educational institutions with close ties to employers

*Pitt County is understood in North Carolina as “Pirate Nation”—a place bursting with pride and enthusiasm for East Carolina University (ECU) and its landmark presence in the county. Declarations of willpower such as “no quarter,” an expression meant to emphasize that a team never surrenders, can be heard ringing in the stands of the ECU Pirates’ sporting events, but perhaps this boldness describes Pitt County even outside the bounds of college athletics.*

Economic change is underway; it will take persistence and intentional actions to take advantage of growth opportunities and to ensure that growth benefits not just the residents that are already “winning,” but empowers all residents, especially those previously cut off from opportunity.

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT: BIG ENOUGH, BUT SMALL ENOUGH

Traditionally known as a rural region focused on agriculture, in 2015 Pitt County has some growing pains. The city of Greenville is becoming an economic hub, with many options for new directions—and many diverse communities in Pitt County at risk of being left behind. Greenville is the tenth largest city in North Carolina, and one of the fastest growing, in the midst of one of the poorest regions of the state. Pitt County has a poverty rate of 24 percent compared with the state rate of 18 percent. African Americans in the region face a poverty rate of 30 percent.

“Med and ed” is the name of the game when it comes to economic vibrancy in Pitt County, with Vidant Medical Center and ECU employing approximately 7,000 and 5,500 people, respectively, of almost 83,000 total workers in the county. It’s difficult to have a conversation about the opportunity available to Pitt County residents without coming back to these two institutions, both located in Greenville—their individual value to the region, as well as their collaborative efforts to help the county thrive. But it hasn’t always been this way. A web of partnerships that include the hospital, economic development, educational institutions, and the larger community of Pitt has been hard-won and strategically designed by leaders intent on putting Pitt County on the map for potential investors.

Manufacturing in the county took a hard hit of 9 percent job loss<sup>1</sup> during the Great Recession, resulting in a wave of displaced workers at Pitt Community College’s (PCC) front doors. But the strong presence of Vidant shielded the county from the worst of the recession; Pitt County economic developers have focused heavily on the growth of the healthcare industry and the attraction of young healthcare professionals to the region. However, there is a growing recognition that too much economic dependence on the hospital system is, in fact, an unsustainable focus for the future of Pitt’s economy, in part because the hospital is both tax-exempt and situated on a large portion of land in the county. Sole economic focus on the medical field also becomes less appealing

considering that the Brody School of Medicine, ECU’s medical school that functions as one of two public medical schools in the state, has faced obstacles in acquiring desired state funds needed to continue serving rural areas to its highest potential.

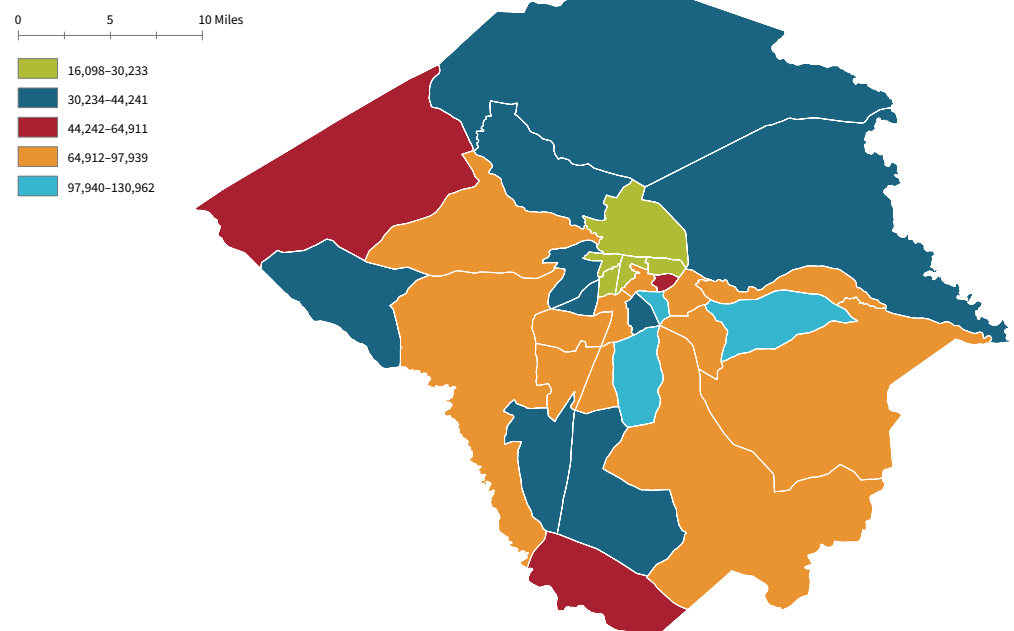
“The hospital has been an economic pillar of our community for a long time,” says President of the Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce Scott Senatore. “Moving forward, there is certainly an interest in adding other economic pillars in an effort to diversify our economy.”

That’s why economic development leaders in Greenville and Pitt County are looking to advanced manufacturing, particularly in the pharmaceutical industry, to make the county not only a center for the healthcare industry, but also a center of advanced biomedical manufacturing. Patheon—a large, pharmaceutical contract manufacturer—announced its move to Greenville in 2014 as an expansion of the already-significant DSM Pharmaceuticals plant. The company has promised 488 new jobs in Pitt County, in addition to 125 expected from Mayne Pharma—another pharmaceutical contract manufacturer created when an Australian company purchased Metrics.

Bets have been placed and the stakes are high for economic growth in Pitt County. As a result, leaders across Pitt’s sectors are focusing their efforts on whether Pitt County has the capacity to produce the home-grown talent necessary to keep industries invested in the area. Yet in a community that is marked by gaps between urban and rural, white and people of color, and low-income and affluent, a handful of concerned leaders are also asking: As Pitt County builds capacity, how can all residents in such a diverse county have the opportunity to participate in economic growth?

“Pitt County is big enough to have the social problems, but it’s

Pitt County Median Household Income



<sup>1</sup> Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. 2015.1 — QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed, data accessed November 16, 2015.



small enough that if it really chooses to come together, I think we can really solve those problems,” says Jim Cieslar, executive director of United Way of Pitt County. “If it can come together.”

## THE CHALLENGE: HOMEGROWN IS SUPERIOR

Even though Greenville is quickly growing, the cost of living remains low and the area still retains the small-town feel that many residents love. However, leaders in development recognize that the in-between feel of Greenville does not appeal to everyone. For young professionals not quite ready to settle down and raise children, Greenville may seem to offer little in the way of cultural attractions. And for many young adults who grow up in Pitt County with a big-city thirst, a certificate or degree from ECU or PCC may be understood as their ticket to somewhere new.

“Corporations in the region have a really hard time recruiting engineers and keeping them,” Dr. Ron Mitchelson, provost of ECU, says in explaining the decision behind the university’s new School of Engineering. “And about the time you have them trained up the way you want them, they’re on the way out. So homegrown, from our perspective, is superior.”

The challenge of retaining home-grown talent is even starker when considering that more than 24 percent of Pitt’s residents live below the federal poverty line. Even though the presence of Greenville gives the impression that the region is prosperous, there are many underserved areas and populations within the county. For example, the region has a sharper race divide than the state as whole: while Pitt County has a larger African-American population than the state average, African Americans’ median annual household income is 45 percent less than that of the county’s white population. Additionally, Pitt County sees wider stratification between the white and black populations’ educational attainment rates, with the white county average of postsecondary degrees higher than the state average and the black county average lower, resulting in a 26 percent gap in educational attainment between the two groups. The education divide has a rural versus urban component to it, as well; for example, in 2013 nearly 90 percent of adults 25 years or older in Greenville had attained a high school diploma and 37 percent had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with 75 percent and 13 percent, respectively, in the rural municipality of Ayden, 11 miles south of Greenville.<sup>2</sup>

Rural communities outside of Greenville fall in PCC’s service area, but the lack of regional public transportation keeps many from entering programs that would connect them with jobs. The N.C. Department of Commerce reported that in 2013, less than 1 percent of Pitt County residents used public transportation in their commute to work. This statistic brings to light what leaders across sectors in Pitt describe as a sorely limited public transportation system, both within the city of Greenville and between Greenville and surrounding rural towns, where 25 percent of the county population resides. The pairing of above-average poverty rates and geographic isolation from work and education makes adequate public transportation a particularly critical piece of Pitt’s infrastructure of opportunity. And Ernis Lee, outreach coordinator for PCC, understands that there are circumstances outside of the

## Northeast: Pitt County

Population (2014, est.) 175,354

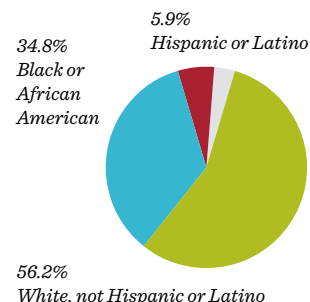
Population growth (2010–2014) 4.3%

Job growth (2010–2014) 22.6%

Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.) 10.1%

Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.) 58.0%

Unemployment rate, 2014 12.1%



For data sources and a comparison to statewide data, please see page 90.

classroom, such as childcare, food scarcity, and family health that keep students from giving academics their undivided attention once they leave the classroom: “Regardless of the work that we do, there’s a lot of social issues going on for students that we can’t do anything about.”

There’s an undeniable cycle of poverty in Pitt County—a cycle that situates children and adults in less ready positions to take advantage of opportunity. Some community leaders, such as Wanda Yuhas, the director of Pitt County’s Economic Development Commission, worry that while Greenville grows, a division between two populations will be exacerbated: a Pitt County that is thriving and a Pitt County that is struggling. “People tell me, ‘There will always be some version of that kind of division. We will never have everyone working at Patheon,’” Yuhas says. “And I recognize that, but I also think that we can have meaningful employment for most people.”

Community leaders in education and economic development are assessing the situation and recognizing a vital connection between curriculum and industry, for both meeting the needs of employers invested in the region and keeping students engaged in what Pitt County has to offer. As Pitt expands its advanced manufacturing sector, this means also expanding educational programs not traditionally offered at a four-year school, resulting in increased attention on Pitt Community College. “If there’s any place that benefits from their community college, we do,” says Dr. Dennis Massey, president of PCC, speaking to the needs of both employers and the population.

## THE STRATEGY: NO ROADBLOCK WE CAN’T FIGURE OUT

Educational institutions and economic development leaders are working together to address needs of both the working population and invested industries. “If we’re not teaching what industry needs, we’re wasting our time,” says Mark Faithful, dean of construction and industrial technology at PCC. That’s why representatives from ECU, the community college, economic development, and the Chamber of Commerce are at the table with employers in the

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau



area, making sure that development of curriculum is an iterative process that doesn't leave students hanging when they reach the end of their degree or certificate. For example, when Patheon was deciding to come to Pitt County, industry leaders met with PCC representatives, who assured that the college was well-positioned to provide the company with a talent pipeline.

Leaders in Pitt County recognize that living up to this promise and bolstering the robust education-to-career continuum will require a good bit of collaboration between industry and the county's three educational institutions. These cross-sector conversations have informed ECU and PCC's decision to partner, with the support of the Golden LEAF Foundation, to create the Biopharmaceutical Workforce Development and Manufacturing Center of Excellence. The center has been proposed as a site of collaboration between education and industry to ensure that residents looking to enter advanced manufacturing in health sciences are trained in the specific skills needed to engage with the demands of Pitt County's growing economy as companies look to hire locally. While design of the center is still underway, leaders at ECU and PCC hope that once the center is available to the community, it will function to attract both workers and industries to job opportunities in Pitt County.

PCC, ECU, and the Pitt County Schools (PCS) system recognize that attracting students to STEM fields starts early, in order to meet the advanced manufacturing needs of the growing industry in the region. In order to do so, the three institutions are working with business in the area to expose middle and high school students to STEM courses that make tangible links between curriculum and job opportunities in Pitt County. For example, the NCEast Alliance, a regional economic development organization, has seen the growing need in Pitt County for the technical and workplace skills required to enter a career in advanced manufacturing. With the support of the Golden LEAF Foundation and Duke Energy Foundation, the Alliance has created STEM labs in middle schools in several counties in the eastern part of the state, including Pitt. Students work in engineering labs that require two partners to accomplish the work, which heightens the pressure on each student to show up and pull their weight. The students work together on hands-on STEM projects that program directors show to local business leaders. Employers then explain to students how their projects relate to their industries' work. This shows students early-on that their courses are relevant and opportunity is close at hand.

Rather than targeting exclusively college-bound students, this middle-school STEM program is also geared towards increasing opportunities for students who perhaps didn't see themselves on a college trajectory. "We hope to reach students who are likely to be left behind, and show them that a four-year degree isn't the only way," says John Chaffee, president of the NCEast Alliance.

At the high school level, however, a program called the Health Sciences Academy provides additional education for students who do intend to pursue a postsecondary education. The academy was formed in 2000 through partnerships between ECU and the Brody School of Medicine, Eastern Area Health Education Center, Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce, Pitt Community College, Pitt County Schools, and Vidant Health. The program allows students in Pitt County high schools to take at least six courses over the span of four years, starting their first or second year of high school, to introduce them to the range of careers available in health sciences

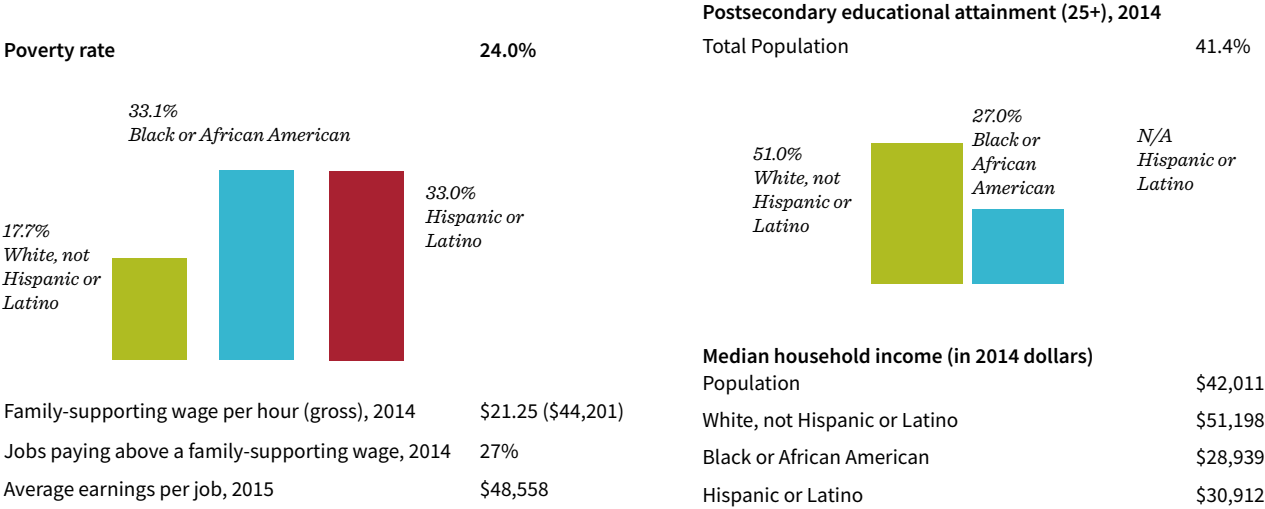
What are the chances a child raised in the lowest quintile of the income distribution will move to another quintile as an adult?

**Jacksonville Commuting Zone** (*Carteret, Craven, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, Pamlico, Pitt*)

Lowest quintile	37%
Lower Middle Quintile	30%
Middle Quintile	18%
Upper Middle Quintile	9%
Highest Quintile	5%



Equity Indicators: Pitt County



“How do we innovate in [intergenerational poverty]?”  
How do we innovate to break that cycle?”

as they go on to seek postsecondary education at a variety of schools, including ECU or PCC. “We’re not just looking for bedside care,” says Lisa Lassiter, the administrator of Vidant Health Careers, commenting on the rationale behind the development of Health Sciences Academy. “We’re looking for lots of different people from different backgrounds and degrees. We strive to expose and groom the students to the many opportunities available.”

The program is available to students who have a 3.0 GPA or higher, have a clean disciplinary record, and are willing to commit to 100 hours of community service over four years, or 25 hours each year. However, Lassiter commented that most students in the program go well above the community service hours requirement in an effort to bolster their résumés for college acceptance and potential scholarships. Of all the academy graduates since 2000, 42 percent are now employed by Vidant, and 80 percent remain in the eastern region of the state, demonstrating the value of the academy in keeping home-grown talent at home.

In this way, Pitt County leaders are making efforts to connect students across course levels with meaningful opportunities, specifically in the life sciences field. “We haven’t really come across a roadblock we couldn’t figure out,” says Dr. Ethan Lenker, Pitt County Schools superintendent, speaking on the collaborative relationship between the university, the community college, and the school system. “It’s all about open-mindedness and doing what we can to create opportunities for the kids.”

Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition among community leaders that if the region is going to thrive, services and programs that intervene even as early as middle school won’t cut it—the root causes that result in students becoming disengaged have to

be addressed at an even younger age. “You can’t provide enough services to move the lever,” says Jim Cieslar, executive director of United Way of Pitt County. “You’ve got to really change the conditions in the community in order to move the lever.”

“Moving the lever” is exactly the focus of United Way of Pitt County, picking up on a new strategy for systems change that several United Way entities across the nation have adopted. “The purpose is to be in the face of the community about how well or how poorly we’re doing,” Cieslar says, noting that the strategy has shifted away from funding a wide array of organizations and towards addressing root causes. The root cause where United Way of Pitt County is placing their bet? Early literacy.

And it’s not just the United Way—economic developers and other nonprofits, such as the Martin/Pitt Partnership for Children (MPPC), have been shaken by the fact that 42 percent of Pitt County kindergarteners enter school without the appropriate level of school readiness. It’s an effort that’s building momentum, in part because the United Way and MPPC have communicated that investing in early childhood education isn’t just a good deed—it’s a smart economic investment. That’s why Wanda Yuhas, director of Pitt’s Economic Development Commission, is on the board for MPPC, and other leaders such as Adelcio Lugo from Self-Help, a community development credit union, and Scott Senatore, president of the Chamber of Commerce, are pointing to early childhood efforts as beacons of hope for increasing opportunity in Pitt County. Investing in early literacy is part of an emerging, cradle-to-career continuum strategy that Pitt County leaders will continue to develop in an effort to build home-grown talent momentum from an even earlier starting point.

## Family-Supporting Wage Occupations with Significant Projected Growth, 2014–2024

*Family-supporting wage for one adult, one child — \$21.25*

SOC	Description	2014 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2014–2024 Change	2014–2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education
25-1099	Postsecondary Teachers	2,574	2,942	368	14%	\$39.79	Doctoral or professional degree
29-1141	Registered Nurses	3,082	3,436	354	11%	\$30.14	Associate's degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	689	822	133	19%	\$48.13	Bachelor's degree
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	549	667	118	21%	\$21.75	Bachelor's degree
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	744	862	118	16%	\$23.08	High school diploma or equivalent
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	408	480	72	18%	\$28.84	Bachelor's degree
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	368	437	69	19%	\$29.48	High school diploma or equivalent
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	426	486	60	14%	\$21.93	Bachelor's degree
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	132	187	55	42%	\$24.72	High school diploma or equivalent
13-1111	Management Analysts	104	155	51	49%	\$26.45	Bachelor's degree

### NEXT STEPS: INNOVATING TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

Leaders in Pitt County are excited by the prospect of advanced manufacturing industries looking to the region for development, as well as the collaboration between business, government, and education to provide and maintain the home-grown talent to feed that industry. But the climb on many challenges remains steep. At the same time as Pitt Community College becomes a more important center for opportunity and education to connect residents with booming industry, obstacles keep certain populations in Pitt County from accessing programs with as much ease as others. Strategies are in the making to bridge these gaps, including a PCC center in Farmville that will start hosting classes in 2016 and efforts to bring successful job training programs to West Greenville, where poverty is most concentrated. Leaders in education and economic development point to STRIVE, a program offered by nonprofit L.I.F.E. of N.C., Inc., that provides disconnected adults with job application skills, as an intervening force for residents who struggle to attain upward economic mobility in Pitt County. But community-based organizations that support residents from the beginning, rather than providing supports to get them back on their feet after they've already fallen on hard times, are lacking.

Because poverty in Pitt County is cyclical, programs that support families and residents more holistically would further address the disparities in education and career opportunities present in the region. For example, programs such as the Health Sciences Academy are valuable assets to producing local talent and connecting a

cohort of students with booming industries in the eastern part of the state. But how can students who experience barriers to reliable transportation, have after-school employment, or have care-taking responsibilities, participate fully, or at all, in programs that require students to spend additional time outside the classroom? In this way, though Pitt County intentionally has programs in place to provide pathways to opportunity, certain circumstances place residents in a less favorable position to access these pathways.

As advanced manufacturing and life science industries grow in the region, community leaders are enthusiastic about the opportunity at hand, while also apprehensive about keeping up with the needs of employers. There's an understanding that staying in collaboration with industry demands and having an accessible curriculum are essential, and the challenge of making sure all the right players are at the table will remain critical to Pitt County's efforts.

"I really think that institutions have a better idea of what's going on now, and they're doing a better job of getting individuals in place who know how to reach this generation," says Denisha Harris, with the Minority and Women Business Enterprise Program of Greenville. "And I see the changes happening and I see the growth in our communities, and I'm really proud of that as a native. But it takes time. People don't move just because you say 'go.'"

It's a tough balancing act: celebrating the growth and potential in Pitt County while recognizing that many residents are not well-positioned to access the opportunity being created. "How do we as a community say, 'We're doing all this great stuff, but we've still got an issue,'" Yuhas says. "How do we innovate in [intergenerational poverty]? How do we innovate to break that cycle?"

# DATA SUPPLEMENT

## DATA DETAILS

### *Postsecondary educational attainment*

- Demographic-specific percentages are calculated from the number of residents 25 years of age and over with a two-year degree or higher out of the total population 25 years and over.
- Due to data suppression, demographic-specific percentages were incalculable for some prosperity zones: Hispanic/Latino populations in Western, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and North Central prosperity zones; Black/African American populations in the Western prosperity zone.

### *Poverty rate*

- Due to data suppression, demographic-specific percentages were incalculable for Black/African American or American Indian populations in the Western prosperity zone.

### *Percent employed*

- In reference to the population 16 years of age and older.

### *Family-supporting jobs*

- For the multi-county zones North Central and Western, the family-supporting and percentage of jobs paying a family-supporting wage are represented by the lowest and highest per county, in the area

### *American Indian*

- Population data were available for the North Carolina counties in the Western prosperity zone only.

## SOURCES

### *US Census Bureau, 2010–2014 American Community Survey*

- Population (2014 estimates)
- Employment to population rate
- Unemployment rate
- Postsecondary educational attainment
- Poverty rate
- Median household income
- 2010–2014 Population growth

### *U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey One-Year Estimates*

- Postsecondary educational attainment (25 years +); unless where noted

### *U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey Three-Year Estimates*

- Postsecondary educational attainment (25 years +) by race/ethnicity for Franklin, Warren, Vance, and Granville Counties only. Data for 2014 was not available.

### *Economic Modeling Specialists International, Inc. & MDC*

- Job growth 2004–2014
- Job growth 2014–2024
- Percent of jobs paying above living wage, 2014
- Average earnings per job, 2015

### *Living Wage Calculator, MIT*

- Living wage figures for county and state, 2014

### *Equality of Opportunity Project: Chetty, Hendren, Kline and Saez (2014): Descriptive Statistics by County and Commuting Zone*

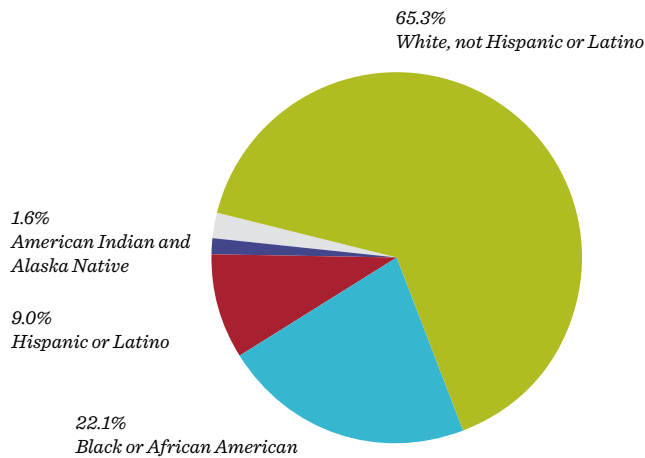
- Child to adult mobility



North Carolina

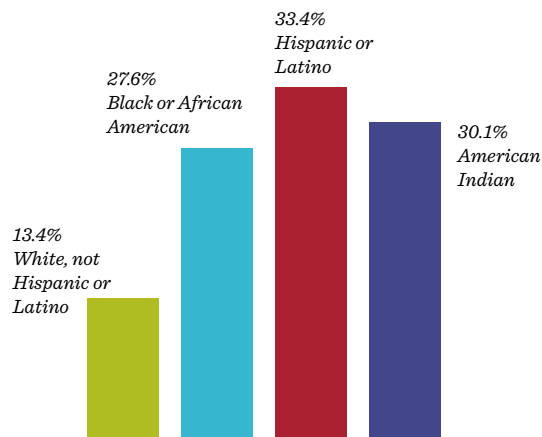
Population (2014, est.)	9,943,964
Population growth (2010–2014)	4.3%

Job growth (2010–2014)	6.80%
Job growth, 2014–2024 (proj.)	12.20%
Employment to population rate, 2014 (est.)	55.6%
Unemployment rate, 2014	10.5%



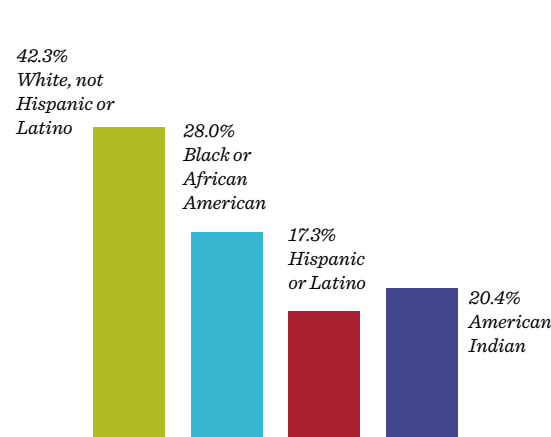
Equity Indicators: North Carolina

Poverty rate 17.6%



Family-supporting wage per hour (gross), 2014	\$21.63 (\$44,990)
Jobs paying above a family-supporting wage, 2014	26%
Average earnings per job, 2015	\$52,416

Postsecondary educational attainment (25+), 2014 37.9%

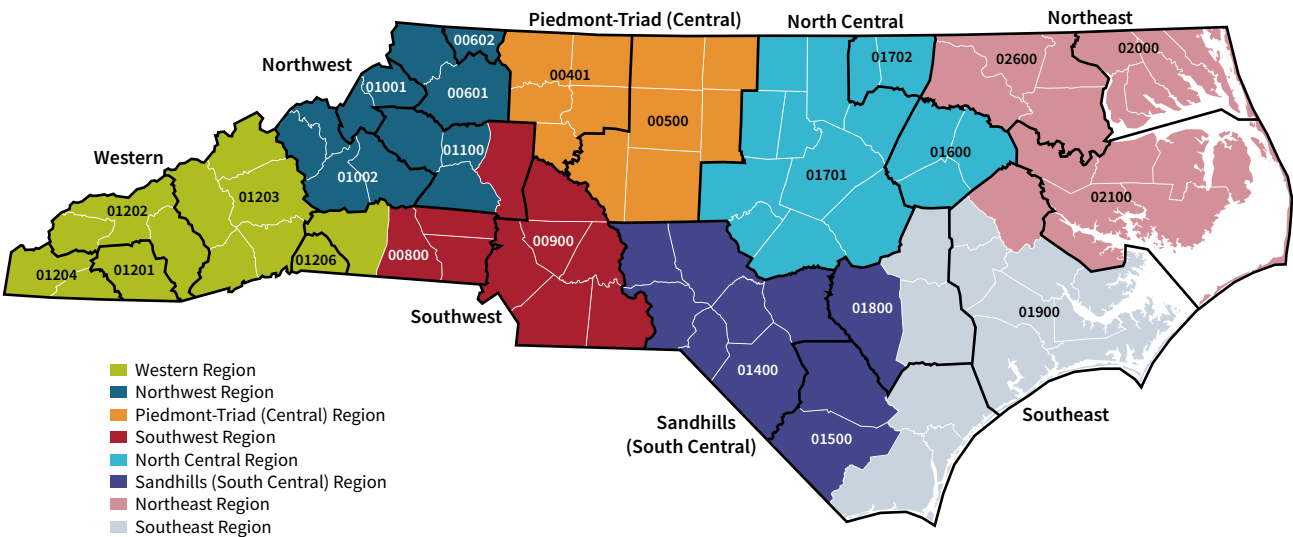


Median household income Population	\$46,693
White, not Hispanic or Latino	\$52,875
Black or African American	\$32,930
Hispanic or Latino	\$34,938
American Indian	\$31,471

# APPENDIX A

## PROSPERITY ZONE DATA

### North Carolina Prosperity and Commuting Zones



Commuting Zone Code	Community Zone Name	Commuting Zone Code	Community Zone Name	Commuting Zone Code	Community Zone Name	Commuting Zone Code	Community Zone Name
01204	Andrews	01002	Morganton	01100	Hickory	00500	Greensboro
01800	Goldsboro	01900	Jacksonville	01202	Sylva	00800	Gastonia
00601	North Wilkesboro	00900	Charlotte	01500	Wilmington	02600	Roanoke Rapids
01201	Franklin	00700	Spartanburg	00602	Galax	01400	Fayetteville
01702	Henderson	02100	Washington	01203	Asheville	01001	Boone
00401	Winston-Salem	01701	Raleigh	01600	Wilson	02000	Virginia Beach

### Educational Attainment by Prosperity Zone

*Percentage of the population 25 years and over with a bachelor's degree or higher, by race and ethnicity*

Prosperity Zone	All	White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino	Black or African American Alone	Hispanic or Latino
North Central Region	36%	43.2%	21.4%	13.2%
Northeast Region	20%	25.4%	10.0%	11.3%
Northwest Region	18%	19.4%	7.9%	6.3%
Piedmont-Triad (Central) Region	25%	27.2%	19.2%	9.5%
Sandhills (South Central) Region	19%	22.8%	14.1%	10.5%
Southeast Region	23%	26.8%	10.5%	8.1%
Southwest Region	30%	33.7%	21.1%	14.4%
Western Region	26%	27.5%	13.4%	11.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## Percent Below the Poverty Line by Educational Attainment, for Population 25 Years and Older, Prosperity Zone

Prosperity Zone	All Education Levels	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate (includes equivalency)	Some college, associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
Sandhills (South Central) Region	17.3%	35.0%	18.9%	13.6%	5.1%
Northeast Region	15.6%	31.5%	16.8%	13.2%	4.1%
Northwest Region	14.8%	29.3%	14.5%	11.7%	4.8%
Western Region	14.1%	30.9%	15.3%	13.2%	5.5%
Southeast Region	13.8%	32.2%	15.1%	11.8%	4.3%
Piedmont-Triad (Central) Region	13.5%	29.3%	14.8%	11.7%	4.1%
Southwest Region	11.8%	28.7%	14.6%	10.1%	3.6%
North Central Region	11.3%	31.9%	14.2%	9.7%	3.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

## Percent Below Poverty Level by Race and Ethnicity, Prosperity Zone

Prosperity Zone	All	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Some other race	Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino
North Central Region	15.3%	24.2%	26.3%	10.3%	33.3%	20.9%	33.0%	8.7%
Northeast Region	21.5%	35.1%	26.3%	16.5%	36.9%	29.2%	32.7%	12.9%
Northwest Region	19.8%	30.4%	29.1%	19.7%	49.1%	39.4%	43.0%	16.9%
Piedmont-Triad (Central) Region	18.0%	28.3%	25.2%	19.3%	41.0%	29.2%	37.1%	12.0%
Sandhills (South Central) Region	22.2%	29.9%	32.6%	14.6%	40.3%	28.4%	35.2%	13.4%
Southeast Region	18.2%	30.9%	23.7%	19.3%	44.8%	26.6%	35.6%	12.5%
Southwest Region	15.3%	24.6%	23.6%	12.8%	31.3%	24.4%	29.5%	9.9%
Western Region	18.0%	40.0%	33.9%	6.5%	37.5%	27.7%	39.2%	15.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey

# APPENDIX B COMMUNITY INTERVIEWEES AND CONTRIBUTORS

## *Guilford County*

- Randy Parker**, President,  
Guilford Technical Community College
- Ed Bowling**, Completion by Design director,  
Guilford Technical Community College
- Michelle Gethers-Clark**, President and CEO,  
United Way of Greater Greensboro
- Maurice “Mo” Green**, Former Superintendent,  
Guilford County Schools, soon-to-be Executive Director  
of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
- Patrice Faison**, Principal,  
Walter Hines Page Senior High School High School
- Winston McGregor**, Executive Director,  
Guilford Education Alliance
- Stephen Moore**, Executive Director, Degrees Matter!
- Tara McKenzie Sandercock**, Senior Vice President,  
Foundation & Community Relations, Community  
Foundation of Greensboro
- Donna Newton**, Executive Director,  
Triad Workforce Solutions Collaborative
- Bobby Smith**, President,  
United Way of Greater High Point

## *Wilkes County*

- Laurie Brintle-Jarvis**, Development & Community  
Resource Specialist, Wilkes Community College
- Donna Cotton**, Director of Secondary Education,  
Wilkes County Schools
- Mark Byrd**, Interim Superintendent,  
Wilkes County Schools
- Linda Cheek**, President,  
Wilkes County Chamber of Commerce
- Jeffrey Cox**, President,  
Wilkes Community College
- Eric Cramer**, President and CEO,  
Wilkes Communications
- Beth Foster**, Director, Work Based Learning,  
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- Rebekah Gardner**, GEAR UP Coordinator,  
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