



Ensuring North Carolina's Global Success

Reducing our "skills gap" through proven
investments in kids

A report by:  **AMERICA'S EDGE**
Strengthening Businesses Through Proven Investments in Kids



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Who We Are

The business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21st century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. Using that analysis, we educate policy-makers and the public about high-quality, proven investments that strengthen businesses, establish a foundation for sustained economic growth, and protect America's competitive edge in a global market place, while helping our nation's children get on the right track.

Our Support

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Executive Summary

If current education and labor market trends continue, North Carolina could face a shortage of 46,000 workers. Some areas of our state are already experiencing a deficit of highly educated and "middle-skill" workers. Looking forward, experts estimate that approximately 77,000 middle-skill workers are at risk of being "under-employed" but lack the education to move into occupations that typically require a bachelor's degree or higher.



To reverse these skills gaps, the North Carolina business leaders of *America's Edge* urge that we increase access to high school education models that will help develop crucial skills needed to produce a world-class, competitive workforce, while ensuring we have rigorous standards, assessments, and accountability systems to accurately measure how well students are performing.

The jobs of the future will require much higher numbers of individuals with an associate's degree or higher. But today, only 38 percent of working-age adults in our state have that level of educational attainment. North Carolina jobs requiring post-secondary education are expected to grow 65 percent faster than jobs for high school dropouts. Twice as many new jobs requiring post-secondary education will exist as compared to jobs for those with a high school education or less. Positions in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are growing particularly fast, and 91 percent of these jobs will require post-secondary education by 2018.

The deficiencies go beyond those related to specific occupations. North Carolina businesses are also concerned about the lack of the increasingly important "soft skills" – communication, collaboration and critical thinking – required for virtually any occupation in today's global marketplace. Six out of 10 surveyed North Carolina employers reported communications skills gaps among job applicants, and close to half reported deficiencies in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Nationally, three out of four executives believe that soft skills will become even more important in the next three to five years because of global competition and the pace of change in the business environment.

Today, education is too often separated from real life, so it can be hard for students to see how education will be relevant to them as adults. This is one reason why one in five of North Carolina high school students does not graduate high school on time, and less than 30 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree. Promising and proven education models provide relevant and core academic curricula, while also incorporating project-based learning, numerous communication activities, critical thinking exercises, and work-based learning opportunities. In conjunction with these models, rigorous standards and aligned assessments now being implemented in North Carolina schools will allow educators to determine how students are doing and use this information to improve instruction, so more students will be college- and career-ready.

The bottom line: The future of North Carolina's economy depends upon the caliber of our workforce. We must invest in what works in our education system if we are going to develop the skilled workforce our businesses need today and into the future. As we continue the debate on strengthening the education system in our state, the conversation must include expanding access to education approaches that help students develop the skills our businesses expect – and need – from their workforce, while ensuring students are developing those skills.



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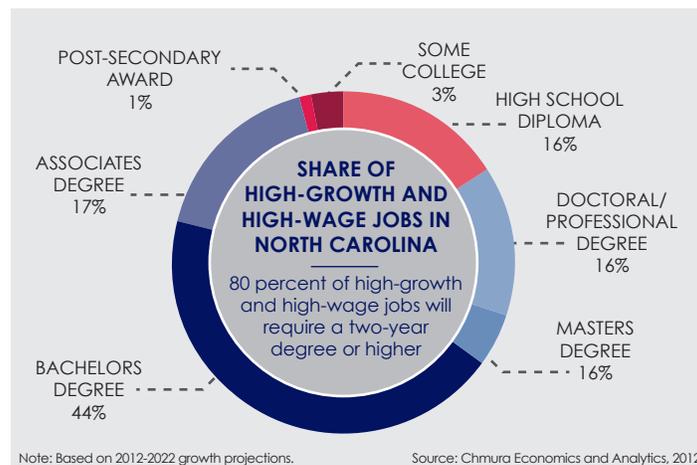
Unprepared Students, Unprepared Workers: Although businesses have always needed workers proficient in the "3 Rs" – reading, writing and arithmetic – today's fast-paced, international marketplace requires even higher proficiency levels in these hard skills. But they are too often lacking, especially among those entering the workforce. Why?

Consider these facts in North Carolina:

- In 2001, North Carolina ranked 4th in the nation in terms of per capita degrees granted in science and engineering. In the latest rankings, North Carolina has fallen to 31st in the nation.¹
- Only 38 percent of North Carolina workers ages 25 to 64 have at least an associate's degree. An additional 23 percent have some college education, but no degree.²
- Only 17 percent of North Carolina Class of 2013 graduates taking the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in all four core areas tested – English, math, reading and science. Students were least prepared in science.³
- 20 percent of high school students do not graduate on time;⁴
- 63 percent of eighth graders are below grade level in math and 74 percent are not proficient in science;⁵ and

- 66 percent of fourth graders read below grade level.⁶

These statistics do not bode well for the ability to fill jobs that have increasingly higher education and/or training requirements.



In fact, if current education and labor market trends continue, North Carolina could face a long-run shortage of 46,000 workers.⁷ The Raleigh-Cary and Durham MSAs are already experiencing a deficit of middle-skilled workers – those with an associate's degree or other professional or vocational certificate. An analysis of occupational trends in North Carolina also shows that approximately 77,000 middle-

skill workers are at risk of being under-employed but lack the education to move into occupations that typically require a bachelor's degree or higher.⁸

What is driving these estimates? The highest annual job growth projected over the next ten years in North Carolina will be for jobs requiring a two-year degree or higher – constituting 80 percent of high growth and high-wage jobs in our state. Experts predict these jobs may be difficult to fill.⁹

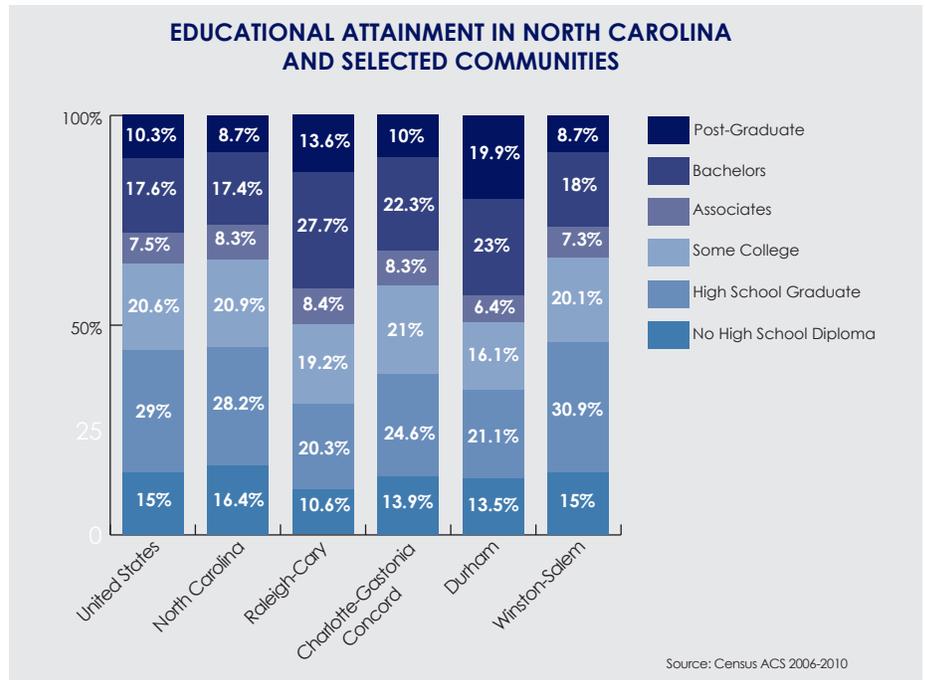
Between 2008 and 2018, North Carolina jobs requiring post-secondary education are expected to grow 65 percent faster than jobs for high school dropouts. In occupations that are expected to have the highest deficits of skilled workers through 2022, 30 percent of positions will require post-secondary education.¹⁰ Twice as many new jobs in North Carolina will require post-secondary education as jobs for those with a high school education or less.¹¹

Jobs that are heavily reliant on technology are also growing fast. The number of STEM jobs in North Carolina is expected to grow by 17 percent between 2008 and 2018, on par with the national average.¹² About 20 percent of the fastest growing occupations over the next ten years in North Carolina will be jobs that require an education foundation in STEM.¹³ Of those STEM jobs, 91 percent will require post-secondary education by 2018 – 65 percent will require a bachelor's degree or higher.¹⁴

Technology is also increasingly central to many jobs in manufacturing, which has shifted to more advanced, computer-assisted production, replacing the manual labor force with automation on the shop floor. To remain viable, workers in manufacturing facilities must now have a technical skill or trade-based skill that machines cannot adequately perform, such as knowledge of mechanical and electrical engineering processes, the ability to operate automated manufacturing systems, and the ability to work with computerized systems and read and write machine programming code.¹⁵

“As the demographics of our workforce change, we must invest strategically in what will keep businesses in our state, attract educated and skilled workers, and move us forward with innovation and technology. The North Carolina Common Core State Standards are a key component of that strategy.”

Ann B. Goodnight
 Director, Community Relations
 SAS Institute, Inc.



Health care jobs are also growing rapidly in North Carolina, with 33 percent growth expected between 2010 and 2020. But only 18 percent of North Carolina health care jobs in 2020 will be for those with only a high school diploma – 82 percent will require some post-secondary education.¹⁶

The inability to find skilled workers will hurt North Carolina's competitive readiness. Workforce shortages or skills deficiencies will have a significant impact on the ability to expand operations or improve productivity – perhaps even forcing companies to move operations out of the state.

Deficiencies in "Soft Skills"/Developing Deeper Learning Skills

Business leaders know that young people entering college and the workforce need a mastery of core academic subjects. But they need more:

- The critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to find answers to challenges that – unlike multiple choice tests – are not on the page in front of them.
- Part of those skills come from learning how to learn – knowing how to find out what they do not already know.
- They will need effective written and verbal communication skills to work as part of a team, or to interact with the public.



Required Skills and Traits for Manufacturing

WHAT WAS NEEDED THEN

- Learning one or two specific technical roles
- Physical strength & flexibility
- Ability to follow fixed, unchanging procedures
- General attention to production & safety procedures
- Following orders
- Operating, maintaining & designing mechanical machinery

WHAT IS NEEDED NOW

- Mechanical reasoning, logic, troubleshooting & spatial visualization
- Personal flexibility, communications & cooperation
- Initiative, persistence & independence
- Attention to detail, self-control & dependability
- Making independent decisions
- Operating computers or computerized machinery & using computers for a wide range of critical functions

Handler et al., 2009

- And, to work as a team, they will have to master collaboration skills, such as interpreting others' messages and responding appropriately.

This preparation includes going beyond rote learning to transfer what they have learned in one subject and apply it in novel ways or different settings in the workplace. It also requires the ability to regulate one's own behavior and emotions to reach goals. Research cited by the National Research Council shows that "being organized, responsible, and hardworking – [has] the strongest correlation with desirable work and educational outcomes [whereas] anti-social behavior ... is negatively correlated with these [desirable] outcomes."¹⁷ All of this goes beyond "textbook" learning to provide students with the skills now needed in a competitive global market.¹⁸

While recognizing their importance, North Carolina employers report major gaps in the soft skills. Six out of 10 surveyed North Carolina employers reported communications skills gaps among job applicants. Close to half of those surveyed reported deficiencies in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Nationally, three out of four executives believe that soft skills will become even more important in the next three to five years because of global competition and the pace of change in the business environment.¹⁹ But in a 2010 survey of 2,000 executives conducted by the American Management Association, nine out of ten executives said that soft skills like communication, collaboration and critical thinking are important to support

business expansion, but less than half of those executives rated their employees as above average in those skills.²⁰

High Cost of the Skills Gap

The lack of a skilled workforce comes at a high cost for individuals, businesses and the economy. In North Carolina, workers with an associate's degree earn annually almost \$15,000 more than a high school graduate and nearly \$25,000 more than a high school dropout.²¹ High school dropouts are so much less productive than high school graduates that each new class of North Carolina dropouts will earn \$4.4 billion less over their lifetimes than their high school graduate peers.²² The returns from a college degree are even greater.

The average lifetime earnings of an individual college graduate are \$2.1 million dollars higher than those of a high school dropout.²³ These staggering earnings losses translate into less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base and lower productivity.

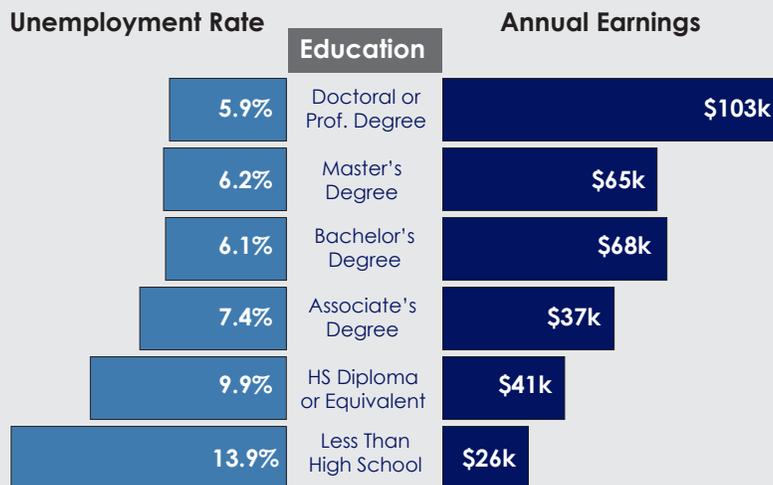
Higher levels of education can also help protect against unemployment. In 2011, 14 percent of high school dropouts nationwide were unemployed. Those without a diploma who were employed were only making an average of \$451 per week. In contrast, only 5 percent of those with a bachelor's degree were unemployed, and employed college graduates could expect to make an average of over \$1,000 per week.²⁴

Individuals with STEM skills also have lower rates of unemployment compared to people without those skills. According to Change the Equation, there are 1.7 jobs for every unemployed person with STEM skills, compared to 4.5 unemployed people competing for every one job without STEM skills.²⁵

Graduating just an extra 1,000 of North Carolina's high school dropouts – less than 2 percent of the class of 2010's dropouts – could result in impressive economic benefits. These 1,000 extra graduates would likely:

- collectively earn \$11 million more in an average year than they would have without a diploma;

Unemployment and Earnings by Education Level in the State of North Carolina



Note: Analysis of 2011, 2012 BLS data. Unemployment rates are for adults age 5 and up. Earnings for ages 25 - 64.

Source: Chmura Analytics, 2012

- spend \$1.1 million more each year purchasing vehicles;
- buy homes worth \$24 million more by the time they reach the midpoint of their careers;
- support 100 new jobs in the state;
- increase the gross state product by \$14 million; and
- increase state revenues by \$1 million annually through their increased spending and investments.²⁶

Remedial courses and training to help students catch up and get on track for higher education and training are helpful, but they are expensive and inefficient. One third of recent North Carolina public high school graduates transitioning to community colleges enrolled in at least one remedial class, along with five percent of four-year college students. In fact, research from Change the Equation shows that 29 percent of North Carolina's community college students need remediation in math, which costs the state more than \$39 million each year.²⁷ North Carolina students who place into remedial coursework are far less likely to complete their degrees, with only 10 percent of community college students graduating within three years and half of 4-year college students graduating within six years.²⁸ In North Carolina, remedial education costs students and the state an estimated \$113 million annually, and up to \$168 million annually after factoring in the reduced lifetime wages of students taking remedial courses.²⁹

Changing Course

As North Carolina and the nation wrestle with the vitally important debate on education reform, businesses know that career relevance must be incorporated into the classroom. Too many students do not understand *why* they need to know what they are being taught, lose interest in school and then do not develop the deeper learning skills employers expect them to have. Innovative high school education models help students stay engaged in school so they graduate with a concrete understanding of what they will need to succeed in the workforce and education post-high school, thus better ensuring North Carolina businesses have a workforce armed with the skills required in a global marketplace.

Wayne School of Engineering - Goldsboro Highschool

Goldsboro, NC

Wayne School is a STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – focused school that emphasizes individual learning, effective teaching, and college- and career-readiness. Opening in 2007, students learn through highly engaging inquiry-based and project-based instruction that promotes collaboration, critical thinking skills and strong communication skills. Students also have opportunities to earn college credit from the local community college. Wayne is reaching students in earlier grades by adding middle school grades during the 2012-2013 school year. Since 2007, Wayne has seen steady increases in its graduation rates – 90 percent in 2007, 95 percent in 2012, and 100 percent in 2013. Graduates earned an average of 18 college credits from courses taken at the community college or from college courses given at the high school. Passing rates on state end-of-course assessments improved over time, with 91 percent of all 2012 assessments exams earning a passing score or better, which is higher than the state's overall passing rate of 81 percent.



Yadkin Valley Regional Career Academy (Valley Academy)

Lexington, NC

Yadkin Valley is a multi-county high school initiative spurred largely by local business leaders to create a school with a focus on the evolving economic needs of the Piedmont Triad Region in central North Carolina. The first of two campuses opened in Davidson County in fall 2012. The academy also serves as a research and development resource to assist high schools in participating districts to develop innovative, career-relevant curricula, effective instructional approaches and uses of technology. Students can choose from three career pathways – advanced manufacturing, global logistics, and health sciences. Students participate in internships during their junior and senior years as well as career-relevant curricula, job shadowing, career orientation, and mentorships supported by business and community partners. The first year yielded successful academic outcomes, including passing rates above 95 percent, significantly higher than the state average.

The NC Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts and Math

The revised North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts and Math, when fully implemented with their aligned assessments, will help ensure that students develop the deeper learning skills required by today's businesses.

Until recently, each state has had its own particular educational standards and tests to assess student achievement. Standards varied greatly across states and even among school districts within a state. State tests also vary, in content and on the level of performance deemed "proficient." As a result, there is a lot of confusion about how students are really doing and businesses have no objective way to compare job applicants from different states—a high school diploma from a state with high standards likely comes with a different skill set than one from a state with low standards.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS)³⁰ offer a way out of this dilemma. The CCSS were developed and led by the states' governors and chief state school officers and have been voluntarily adopted by 45 states, including North Carolina, as well as the

District of Columbia, four U.S. territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity. In 2008, the North Carolina Board of Education began its periodic process of adapting state educational standards, in every content area, to match current demands from colleges and the workplace. As part of this process, in 2010, the Board unanimously voted to adopt the Common Core State Standards to become the NC Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts and Math. North Carolina thus became one of the first states to adopt the CCSS and they were implemented starting in the 2012-2013 school year.³¹

The CCSS establish a shared, rigorous set of educational standards for English language arts and mathematics for K-12 education. The standards reflect businesses' needs for a highly-skilled workforce that has mastered core academic content and is able to think critically, solve complex problems and communicate effectively (i.e. deeper learning skills). The CCSS establish the content and skills that children must learn at each grade level, but they do *not* tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under teacher, local or state control.

North Carolina is a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium,³² one of the two main groups of states developing common assessments based on the CCSS. Implementation of the assessments will begin in 2014-2015. The assessments will allow educators to determine how students are doing and to use this information to improve education, so more students will be college- and career-ready. Short-term assessments will allow teachers to determine students' understanding of concepts and then adjust teaching in real time, to increase understanding. The data from these assessments will also help educators identify and share educational practices that work with other schools and districts. Employers could also use new assessment scores to compare applicants and find those who have the reading and language or math skills needed. In 2012-2013, students took interim North Carolina

“We from the business community fully support the North Carolina Common Core State Standards. Why? Because they were expressly designed to develop skills for real jobs in a modern economy.”

Billie Redmond
Chief Executive Officer,
TradeMark Properties

state tests that were redesigned to align them with the CCSS.

With regard to other assessments, students in North Carolina and every state take college admissions exams, particularly the SAT and the ACT. These admission exams, as well as the newly redesigned high school equivalency test (GED), are all going to be aligned to the Common Core State Standards. This will provide an additional layer of accountability, allowing parents and educators to ensure that students are college- and career-ready.

In addition to assessments, in order to affect student outcomes, we also need stronger curricula, compatible with the CCSS. Better pre- and in-service training will also be necessary, including support for teachers and leaders learning how to use the CCSS assessment data effectively.³³ As assessments will be computer-based, schools must also have sufficient hardware and bandwidth to accommodate the assessments. However, current spending will cover a significant proportion of the costs of implementing the CCSS.³⁴

The CCSS can help ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education consistently, from district to district and state to state. The new educational standards and assessments will not magically turn things around overnight. Because the CCSS are much more rigorous than North Carolina's prior standards,³⁵ the new assessments are going to be tougher than previous state tests. At first there is likely to be a decrease in test scores, not because students are doing worse, but because we will be accurately measuring how well students are meeting higher standards. With rigorous standards and assessments of our students, we will be better able to prepare our students for success in post-secondary education and the workforce.

Developing Skills Businesses Need through High School Education Models

One of the best – and proven – ways to impact the skills gap is to equip high school students for success in both post-secondary training and/or education and their future careers. Students need to understand how education is relevant to a career, understand their options and what is expected in the work place, and develop communication, collaboration and critical-thinking capabilities. Innovative models and approaches are achieving these goals.

A common element in many of these proven and promising high school education models is the integration of rigorous academics, career-relevant instruction, support services for students and real-world, work-based learning experiences supported by industry and community partners over a three- or four-year period. A number of schools have also adopted educational approaches that

Enloe Medical Bio-Science Academy, The William G. Enloe High School

Raleigh, NC

The mission of the Enloe Medical Bio-Science Academy is to provide students with the core academic knowledge and technical skills that will enable them to continue their educations beyond high school and obtain employment in health-care fields. The Academy started in 1996 and has graduated 15 classes of students for a total of about 450 students.

The Academy developed a curriculum that integrates the technical skills, the terminology of health-related occupations, and innovative approaches to provide its students with project-based and work-based learning opportunities. Academy teachers also integrate soft skills into the curriculum.

Students participate in internships at the National Institute of Environment Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park, as well as hospitals, medical clinics, research labs, and the North Carolina Health Department. All of their graduates complete a health career internship and about 50 percent of the graduates obtain various professional medical certificates, including pharmacy technician or certified nursing assistant, prior to high school graduation.

The percentage of Academy graduates continuing their post-secondary education or training is 100 percent. Over 60 percent of the graduates continue to medical, nursing, dental, veterinary, pharmacy schools or other medical-related higher education institutions.



focus on problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills.

Career Academies and Pathways

Career Academies is a proven approach found throughout the United States and in North Carolina that incorporates real-world, work-based learning. Although some programs are stand-alone



Enhancing Deeper Learning Skills

Skills Necessary for Success

To be equipped with the knowledge and abilities businesses now require, students must:

Master Core Academic Content

Students must be able to demonstrate a baseline understanding of core content knowledge and apply facts, processes and theories to real-world situations.

Think Critically and Solve Complex Problems

Students must be able to apply tools and techniques learned from core subjects to formulate and solve problems, using them to evaluate, integrate and critically analyze multiple sources of information. Students must be able to learn to reason and construct justifiable arguments creatively, encompassing non-linear thinking and persistence.

Work Collaboratively

Students should demonstrate the ability to cooperate together to identify and create solutions to social, vocational and personal challenges. This includes the ability to identify common goals; to organize resources necessary for meeting group goals; and to learn to

communicate and incorporate multiple points of view to better achieve goals.

Communicate Effectively

Students must be able to organize their thoughts and findings in clear, meaningful and useful ways and express themselves in both written and oral forms. They must be able to listen well and present others' concepts, as well as their own.

Learn How to Learn

Students must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and be able to monitor and direct their own learning. They should understand and be prepared to meet changing expectations in a variety of academic, professional and social environments.

Develop Academic Mindsets

Students must develop academic mindsets that are positive, motivated, and resilient. Students should commit to completing their work, meeting goals, doing quality work, and searching for solutions to overcome obstacles.

schools, including charter or magnet schools, most are pathways within larger comprehensive high schools. Often called a "school-within-a-school," pathways typically comprise no more than 200 students who stay together with the same teachers for the duration of the program. That continuity helps create close relationships among the students, their peers and their teachers. It creates the kind of "team player" mentality employers too often find lacking in their younger employees.³⁶

Key elements in these proven and promising high school education models, such as Career Academies, are:

- *Work-based learning* such as mentorships, job shadowing opportunities and internships with local employers brings actual career relevance to the students, deepening their understanding of how traditional academics are used in careers. This helps direct them toward training and education opportunities that will get them the skills North Carolina employers are seeking.³⁹

- *Project-based learning* helps students make connections across subjects and brings greater relevance to classroom learning. Students work together on projects, developing academic and technical skills, as well as more experience with collaboration, communication and critical thinking.⁴⁰

“We need increased access to education approaches that will engage students, helping them understand their options and how education is relevant to a career.”

Richard L. McNeel
Chairman of the Board,
LORD Corporation

- *School-based enterprise*, like student-led businesses or community service initiatives, is another form of work-based learning. It allows students to design, produce and deliver real products and services.
- *Support services*, including counseling as well as additional instruction in reading, writing and mathematics, help students keep their grades up and stay on track for graduation.⁴¹

In a well-designed study of Career Academies across America, students were twice as likely as nonparticipants to be working in the computer, engineering or media technology sector eight years after graduation, thus helping to increase the supply of STEM workers.⁴² Young people who went through Career Academies earned more and were more productive than those not in the program.⁴³

Other Innovative Education Models

A number of schools around the nation have adopted educational approaches to promote deeper learning and help ensure that students focus on these critical problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. Included among the educational models that focus on developing these skills in North Carolina are Expeditionary Learning and New Tech Network. These education models focus on cultivating the skills North Carolina businesses need:

- Expeditionary Learning (EL) is a comprehensive school reform model that uses project-based learning to help students cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. A hallmark of this school reform model are learning expeditions, which are interdisciplinary real-world projects which serve as the primary curriculum units in EL schools. Student success is assessed using three indicators: academic achievement, quality of student work, and evidence of student engagement.⁴⁴ Expeditionary Learning has a network of 165 schools in 29 states, including 3 schools in North Carolina: in Shelby, Asheville, and Boone.⁴⁵
- New Tech Network works nationwide with schools to support innovations in education, helping students gain the knowledge and deeper learning skills they need for college and career success. Key features of this instructional approach are project-based learning, use of technology, and maintaining a school culture of trust, respect, and responsibility. New Tech Network supports 120 schools in 18 states and Australia, including 4 schools in North Carolina: in Wadesboro, Durham, Raleigh, and Warrenton.⁴⁶

Academy of Information Technology, Apex High School

Apex, NC

Apex Academy is affiliated with the National Academy Foundation, a series of high schools and learning communities within larger schools that focus on industry-based curricula, work-based learning experiences, and business partner expertise in five themes: Finance, Hospitality & Tourism, Information Technology, Engineering, and Health Sciences. The Apex Academy was established in Fall 2001 and focuses on the information technology sector.

The Apex Academy's advisory board is primarily from the business community and works to place 100 percent of eligible students in internships each year. All of their junior students during school year 2012-2013 were placed in internships between their junior and senior years. Advisory board members also provide job shadowing opportunities and serve as judges for project-based competitions.

Of its first graduating class in May 2005, over 90 percent continued their education at higher education institutions. Currently, the Academy has a graduation rate of 100 percent with most, if not all, continuing their post-secondary education or training.

Although evaluation research has not yet assessed the effectiveness of these models, their focus on these key learning skills that businesses need shows promise for helping students be better equipped for problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Through these promising models, North Carolina high school students understand the skills they will need in a particular occupation and can make more informed decisions about post-secondary education and training.

Whether North Carolina students go directly into the workforce or pursue advanced education, they should ultimately enter the workforce much more prepared to hit the ground running, potentially reducing the time and cost of on-the-job training.

Wake Early College of Health and Sciences

Raleigh, NC

Wake Early College benefits from a close partnership with WakeMed, one of Raleigh's major hospitals, creating a school that is equipping students not only with the core academic knowledge in health and sciences, but with solid skills to prepare them for college and career. WakeMed helped to found Wake Early College in 2006 and has another key partner in Wayne Technical Community College. Students participate in job shadowing activities, internships and mentorships that connect them with practicing medical professionals. As a result, students receive real world exposure to health care careers and learn from professionals about the skills needed for success in college and career.

Student outcomes have been significant since the school opened its doors. The school's graduation rate has remained well above 90 percent for all three of its first classes since the first completed in 2011, higher than the state average. The school achieved a graduation rate of 100 percent in 2013. More than half of the 2013 graduating class also earned associate degrees. Several earned additional certifications as nurse assistants and emergency medical technicians. The school's passing rate on state assessments exceeded 95 percent for each of the last three years, which is higher than the state average.

Conclusion

North Carolina runs the risk of falling behind when it comes to preparing its future workforce to compete successfully in a global economy. To meet the future demands of a more skilled and educated workforce, policy-makers should make sure we invest in what really works and include promising and evidence-based approaches that will ensure young people enter the workforce with the skills North Carolina businesses need. State school districts should be encouraged in fully implementing the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts and Math and aligned assessments, and the state should grant its school districts greater flexibility to incorporate proven or promising education models using deeper learning into their high schools. They can draw on their existing resources and state funding to follow these approaches. If we are serious about securing North Carolina's economic future we must act now to get our businesses the highly-skilled workforce we need to innovate and grow in the global marketplace.

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