

Policy Recommendations

Presented to the
North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development
by the Valuing Education Task Force

During the meetings of the Valuing Education Task Force, the group identified several key areas where the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development could recommend changes that would assist in the long-term development of a workforce that is better educated, more connected to the education system, and more likely to find opportunities to learn and grow in North Carolina. Furthermore, the group discussed ways to advance workforce development, economic development and education systems that are better integrated at all levels.

A Central “Value of Education” Message. Comments were articulated regarding a message to reach vulnerable populations; a PR campaign; taking a regional approach; addressing a culture of low expectations; changing our ideologies about education (individualism vs. collectivism); community involvement; promoting a theme of early childhood development; preventing a permanent low-skilled, low-wage workforce; promotion of lifelong learning; decreasing the dropout rate; and actually talking to the people we are trying to help.

Recommendations:

- 1) Advance a public awareness campaign to reach vulnerable, disengaged populations, providing them with a roadmap for success. This campaign should be implemented at the regional level and focus on getting the message of the value of education and training to rural residents, low-wage workers, high school dropouts, dislocated workers, non-English speaking workers, low-skilled in-migrants, and parents.
- 2) Include and provide funding for a “valuing education” or lifelong learning aspect in future workforce development initiatives (such as the Allied Health Sector Strategy Initiative and the Regional Collaboration Grant Program) through models such as Career Ladder or Apprenticeship programs.
- 3) Provide students in danger of dropping out of school and their families with support services.

A Seamless Education System. Needs were expressed for a better coordinating structure within public education; uniting K-12, the Community College system, and the University system; a seamless pathway of education for students, including seamless ESL (English as a Second Language) programs state-wide, and a coordinated data system for tracking students.

Recommendations:

- 4) Promote and support a coherent, formalized mechanism of collaboration through the Education Cabinet to unite public education in the state of North Carolina.
- 5) Create a structure which provides for a seamless pathway of education for students from pre-school to graduate school, and into the workplace.
- 6) Develop or improve information systems to follow up on students throughout the entire education system, including their postsecondary education journey and into their employment career.

Connecting the Dots between Education and Economic Development. Input sessions addressed the challenge of uniting education and economic development efforts, and encouraging more public dialogue about the relationship of education to economic development.

Recommendation:

- 7) Advance the integration of education, workforce development, and economic development. Encourage collaboration at the state and regional levels of the Department of Commerce and the Education Cabinet (Department of Public Instruction, and public and private community colleges and universities) to assure that the educational system produces the “work-ready”, skilled workers needed, and that these workers can find jobs in North Carolina.

Aligning Education with Opportunity. From multiple sources we heard concerns regarding the preparation of our workforce for future jobs in emerging industries; and sending the message that education is more than just attaining a bachelor’s degree – that credentials and/or two-year degrees are also viable options for a well-paying, skilled career. Comments were also voiced regarding the lack of knowledge and understanding citizens have of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms, tax forms, credit, applications to higher-education, etc.

Recommendations:

- 8) Align education, training, and other workforce initiatives to prepare North Carolina’s workforce for jobs in high-priority industry sectors such as biotechnology, allied health, and aerospace technology. Encourage public-private partnerships among the key industry sectors and the Early Childhood, K-12, Community College and University systems, including private colleges and universities.
- 9) Increase the number of short-term educational programs that allow all workers to access more education or training with less commitment of time and resources. Create career pathways for workers apart from college degrees, emphasizing trade and certificate programs.
- 10) Advance and reinforce programs that educate vulnerable populations concerning financial literacy, and that contribute to more simplified and user-friendly applications and forms related to access to higher education and training.

Building Connections between North Carolina and the World. Discussions were held regarding the attraction and retention of foreigners and college graduates in North Carolina, maintaining contact with foreign and/or out-of-state graduates, and encouraging them to start businesses here.

Recommendations:

- 11) Develop a marketing campaign aimed at encouraging graduates of North Carolina’s universities and community colleges, especially foreigners and out-of-state graduates, to stay in North Carolina after graduation. Connect these students to entrepreneurial opportunities in the state.
- 12) Build a database of foreign students who have attended North Carolina’s colleges, universities, and graduate schools to maintain on-going connections as a way to advance economic development efforts between North Carolina and other countries.