

# Finding a Better Way

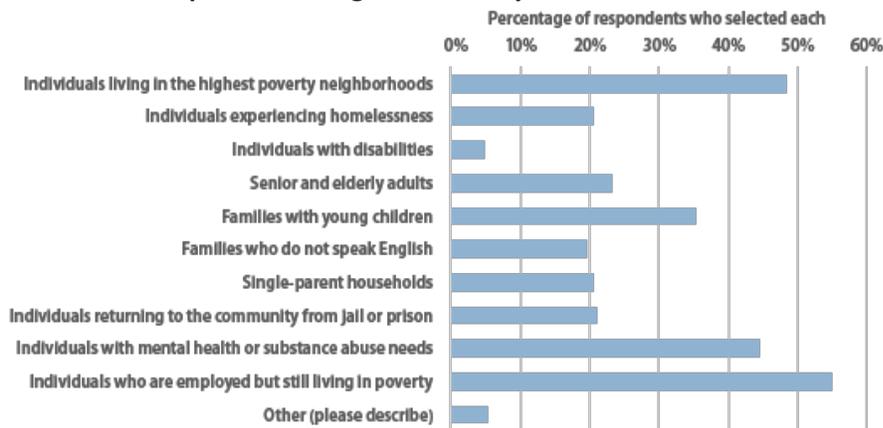
---

A Case Study on Challenges to Inclusive Economic  
& Workforce Development

## The Economy

Dogwood County is located in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. In this county, the barriers to employment that pays a living wage are significant for many residents, even as the county begins to create more jobs. The economy has generally improved since the recession of 2008, and as of April 2019 the latest data available from the North Carolina Department of Commerce show an unemployment rate of 4.2 percent for the county. However, in a recent survey, 55 percent of respondents chose “Individuals who are employed but still living in poverty” as one of Dogwood County’s three most important Specific Populations needs (Figure 1). It was the most-chosen response.

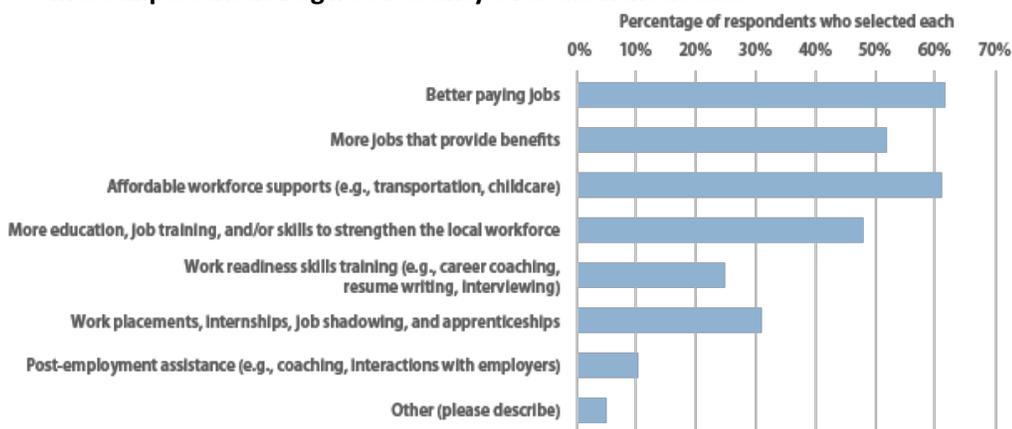
**Figure 1: Selections in response to, “Select up to three Specific Populations needs you believe will be most important in Dogwood County over the next decade”**



Source: ncIMPACT survey.

In addition, 62 percent of respondents chose “Better paying jobs” as one of the three most important Employment Support needs (Figure 2). It was the most-chosen response.

**Figure 2: Selections in response to, “Select up to three Employment Support needs you believe will be most important in Dogwood County over the next decade”**

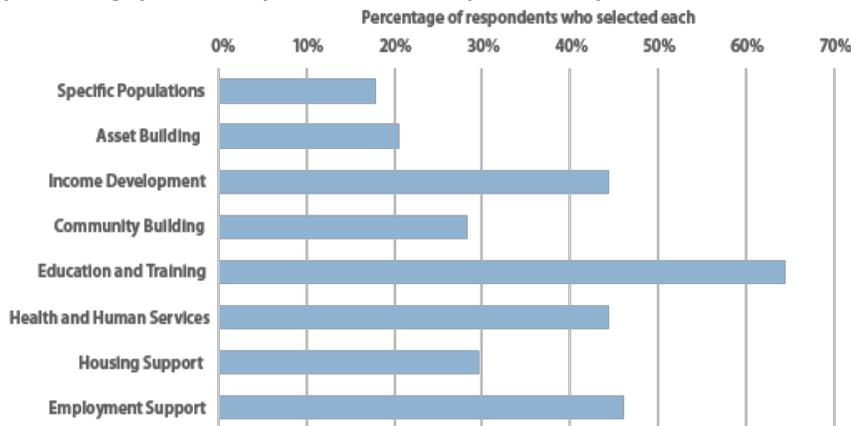


Source: ncIMPACT survey.

Taken together, these results show that working people are challenged to earn enough to make ends meet.

One common way to increase compensation is to increase a worker’s level of education and training, and indeed, among the eight overall categories of needs in our survey, 64 percent of respondents chose “Education and Training” as one of the three most important. It was the most-chosen response, with “Employment Support” the next highest at 46 percent (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Selections in response to, “Thinking back over the eight categories of needs detailed in the preceding questions, please indicate up to three you think are most important in the list below”**



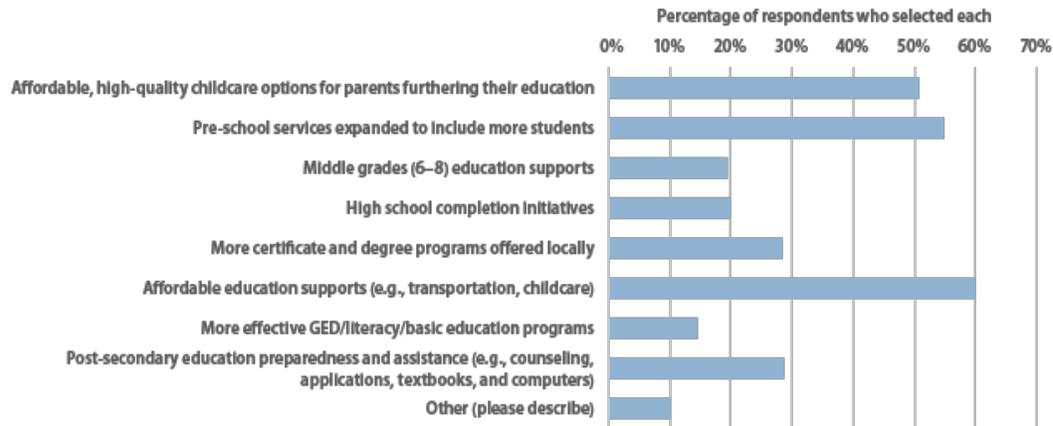
Source: nclIMPACT survey.

### Education

Both Dogwood County and its major city have educational attainment rates generally in line with their respective peers. In the aggregate, about 89 percent of those aged 25 and older in Dogwood County have at least a high school diploma (or equivalent), but only about 34 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher. These education attainment rates vary considerably across racial and ethnic groups.

Anticipating the demand for more education and training, and the possible gap, we asked survey respondents to drill down into specific Education and Training needs. The most-chosen one was “Affordable education supports (e.g., transportation, childcare),” selected by 60 percent of respondents as one of the three most important (Figure 4). For many, the impediments to enhancing education and training are presently insurmountable.

**Figure 4: Selections in response to, “Select up to three Education and Training needs you believe will be most important over the next decade”**



Source: nclIMPACT survey.

The future is compromised for the substantial number of children enrolled in elementary schools characterized by low educational outcomes and pervasive segregation by race and income. In September 2017, the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) published its NC Innovative School District list of 48 schools facing possible state takeover. Eight Dogwood County district elementary schools were on the statewide list, which DPI compiled using the following criteria:

- schools that earned an overall school performance score in the lowest 5 percent of all schools in the state in the prior school year, and
- include all or part of grades K–5, and
- did not exceed growth in at least one of the prior three school years and did not meet growth in at least one of the prior three school years, and
- did not adopt one of the established reform models in state statute in the immediate prior school year.

Further, in its 2018 publication *Stymied by Segregation*, the North Carolina Justice Center used several indexes to measure racial segregation in North Carolina school districts.<sup>1</sup> The first, the racial dissimilarity index, calculates the percentage of students who would have to change schools in order to equalize the racial distribution of students across schools within a given district. Dogwood County Schools System’s index (43 percent) was third highest among the state’s ten largest school districts for the 2016–17 school year.

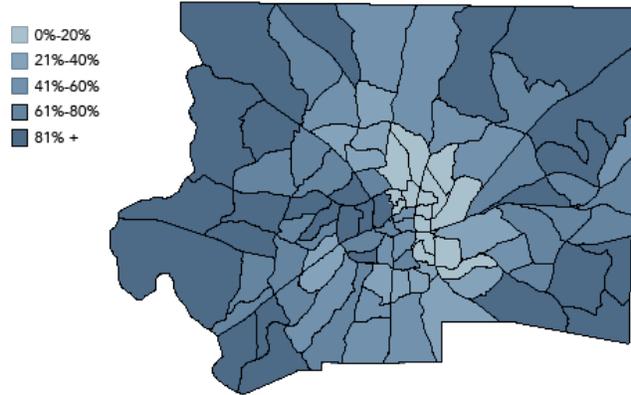
In Dogwood County, there are about 4,500 4-year-olds. Only about one-third of those children are enrolled in high-quality pre-K programs. A local foundation recently pledged \$40 million over 10 years to improve access for all children. The community is excited about the opportunity, but little is known about the barriers for PreK.

1. Kris Nordstrom, *Stymied by Segregation: How Integration Can Transform North Carolina Schools and the Lives of Its Students* (Raleigh: North Carolina Justice Center, 2018).

### Residential Segregation

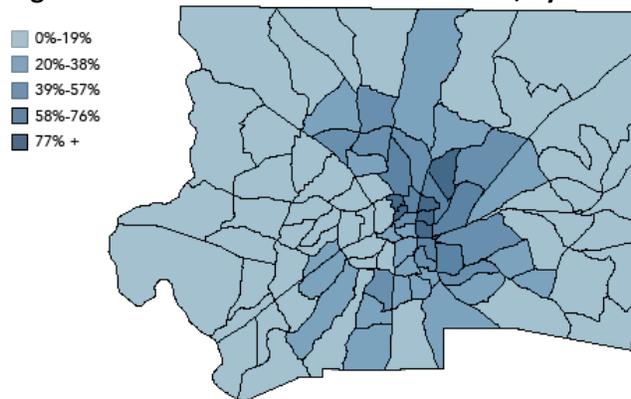
Residential clustering by race was one oft-cited characteristic of Dogwood County. To analyze this finding, we used the latest available census tract-level data to create maps showing where Dogwood’s White and Black populations reside, from least to most concentrated. The highway divide, describing the poorer neighborhoods east of a local highway and often mentioned by interviewees, is clearly visible on the maps.

**Figure 5: Concentration of White residents, by County census tract**



Source: Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates (2016).

**Figure 6: Concentration of Black residents, by County census tract**



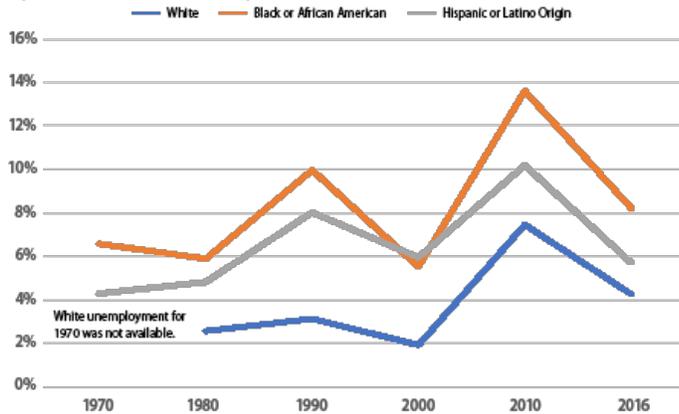
Source: Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates (2016).

In addition, we used a metric from the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps Program—a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute—to compare Black-White residential segregation in Dogwood County with that of other counties across North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> The program’s residential segregation index ranges from 0 (complete integration) to 100 (complete segregation): North Carolina counties have an index ranging from 5 to 70 on the scale. Although Dogwood’s index (49) is about the same as the overall index for North Carolina (50), the county was tied for 14th-most segregated among the 92 North Carolina counties for which data were available.

2. For more information, visit the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps Program website at <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/north-carolina/2018/measure/factors/141/data>.

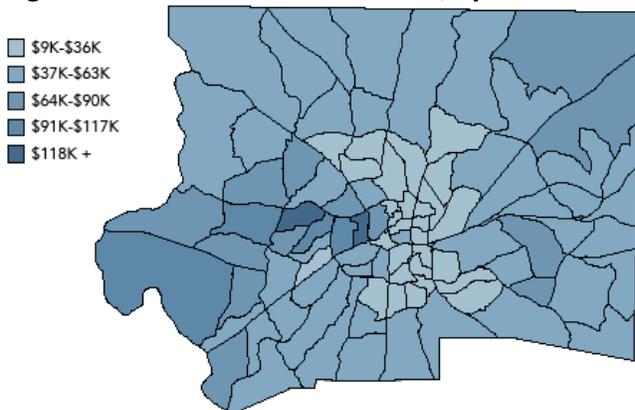
By various metrics, it is clear that Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics are, on average, living in different economies in Dogwood County. First, looking at the trend of average annual employment in census years and in 2016, we can see that Hispanic and especially Black unemployment remained significantly above that of Whites during periods of both growth and recession.

**Figure 7: Unemployment in DOGWOOD County, annual average for specified years, 1970–2016, by race and ethnicity**



Source: Census Bureau decennial counts (1970–2000) and ACS 1-year estimates (2010); Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

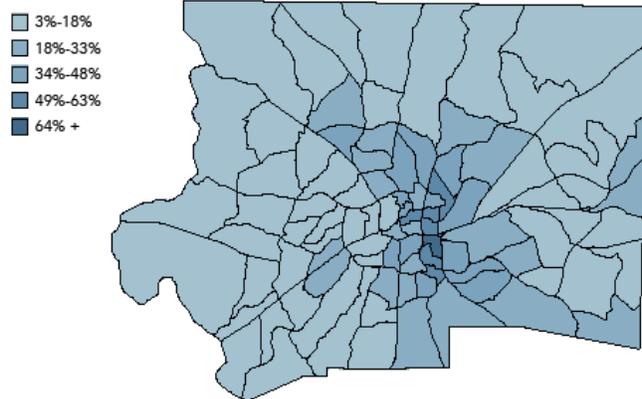
**Figure 8: Median household income, by Census tract**



Source: Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates (2016).

This disparity is also evident in the clustering of high poverty in neighborhoods.

**Figure 9: Concentration of residents in poverty in the past 12 months, by Census tract**



Source: Census Bureau, ACS 5-year estimates (2016).

Considering this information in the context of the residential segregation described above, it is not surprising that Blacks responded differently than Whites to certain survey questions about economic conditions in Dogwood County. Most notably, on a scale of 0 to 10, the mean Black response—reflecting intensity of agreement—was about 20 percent higher than the mean White response for the statement, “Dogwood County’s racial climate impacts the ability of financially disadvantaged residents to move up the economic ladder” (8.1 and 6.8, respectively).

### **Disconnectedness**

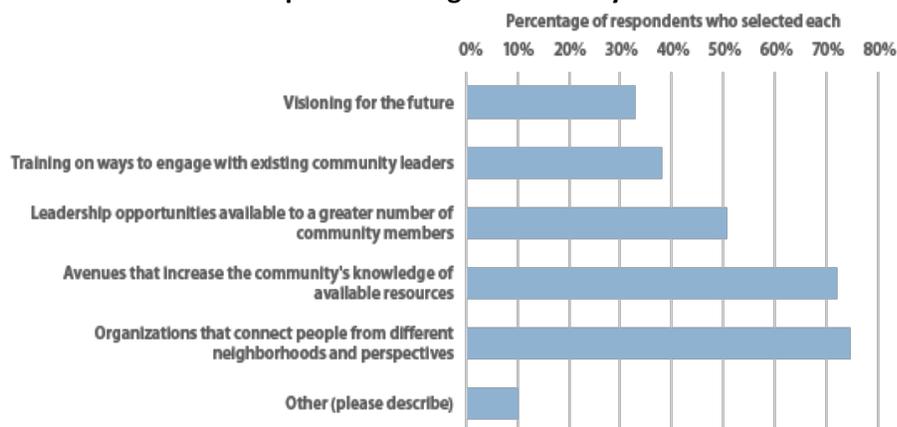
Residential segregation and economic disparity can combine to produce increasingly separate communities living within the same civic boundaries of Dogwood County. This situation produces social segregation. As one participant put it, “There is a lack of connection with others who are of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Where does it happen? Not usually in schools. Not usually in neighborhoods. Maybe at work and during volunteer opportunities.”

Some of the other comments we recorded were similarly direct and, in some cases, striking. For example:

- “These options are really limited and assume we have a community. I don’t think we do. I think we have several groups, each of which pursue their own interests. I would suggest our community needs spaces where people encounter difference and work collectively together.”
- “Isolation and lack of connectedness to one another appears to be the vector for our community’s (and our country’s) most insidious illnesses. We all—not just those with the financial means—need our community to do all it can to draw us in, because when we’re ‘in’ ... we will naturally do what needs to be done for ourselves and our community.”
- “The pools in the summer are segregated. Even the [social justice] marches are segregated.”

Our survey provided further evidence of this feeling of disconnectedness in the community. Among six Community Building need options in our survey, 74 percent of respondents chose “Organizations that connect people from different neighborhoods and perspectives” as one of the three most important (Figure 11). It was the most-chosen response.

**Figure 11: Selections in response to, “Select up to three Community Building needs you believe will be most important in Dogwood County over the next decade”**



Source: ncIMPACT survey.

One key factor that appears to exacerbate residential, economic, and social segregation in Dogwood County is the region’s public transportation infrastructure. We heard repeatedly from participants that the system’s buses, especially, tend to underserve minority neighborhoods and make it harder for residents to expand their horizons regarding where to live, work, and play. While we did not study the transportation system, some of the more specific comments we received include:

- “The whole area around public transportation—which seems to be in a self-imposed death spiral—needs to be reimaged and revamped to make it a compelling option for all residents, not just disadvantaged ones.”
- “Expanded public transit would afford greater mobility for the poor who are public transit dependent and constrained by limited transit options.”
- “Transportation services/supports seem like an obvious target for expansion given our struggling population—services are of no use if you can’t get there.”
- “Transportation is often a barrier for many families and providing improved transportation services to underserved neighborhoods would be ideal.”
- “Public transportation (bus service) as a mobility asset for the entire community is a creative subsidy for the poor.”

The challenges with the schools can be seen in young adults. Disconnected youth are young people aged 16–24 who are not in school and not working. Disconnected youth emerged as a cohort of significant concern in both the survey responses and the focus groups and interviews, where we heard the following:

- “One-third of the shelter population is aged 16–24.”
- “I volunteered as a high school mentor for two years. What I found were students anxious to graduate, but with no idea on next steps unless they knew they were heading out to college or community college and already had the needed support to go to school. Often kids have parents who cannot maneuver the system and/or don’t have the tools to help their kids search.”
- “Should greatly expand capacity (numbers served plus breadth and depth) for mentoring 16–25 year olds—including those with and without children, and those who never were in foster care—who lack parents, grandparents or other relatives capable of getting them through the ‘transition to adulthood’ phase of life.”
- “There is a wealth of talented older tradesmen who could teach young unemployed males and females the crafts needed to gain entry onto the ‘economic mobility highway’ if we would validate that concept with the necessary resources to the appropriate neighborhoods.”

### **Opioid Misuse**

Dogwood County had the largest increase among urban counties in opioid-related deaths from 2005 to 2015, according to a North Carolina report released in 2017. The county went from 13 deaths in 2005 to 53 in 2015. Opioid misuse impacts the county in numerous ways including: increased children in the custody of the local social services department, increased infection from intravenous drug use reported by the local health department, increased emergency calls for all first responder agencies (fire, police, and EMS) due to overdoses, and increased criminal activity leading to higher numbers of residents incarcerated in the county jail. The school system also reports increased absenteeism and poor performance from students as a result of their parents' substance misuse.

## Resources:

MyFutureNC

[https://www.myfuturenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/myFutureNC\\_Two-Page\\_February-2019.pdf](https://www.myfuturenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/myFutureNC_Two-Page_February-2019.pdf)

Building a Skilled Workforce for a Stronger Southern Economy

[https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/files/pdfs/community-development/southern\\_states\\_report.pdf?la=en](https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/files/pdfs/community-development/southern_states_report.pdf?la=en)

Inclusive Economies Indicators

<https://assets.rockefellerfoundation.org/app/uploads/20161212162730/Inclusive-Economies-Indicators-Full-Report-DEC6.pdf>

Nearly 1 million people were out of the workforce because of opioid addiction in 2015, according to study

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/03/27/more-than-4-million-people-left-the-workforce-because-of-opioid-addiction-according-to-study/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.689c67934560](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/03/27/more-than-4-million-people-left-the-workforce-because-of-opioid-addiction-according-to-study/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.689c67934560)

EARLY WARNING! Why Reading at the End of Third Grade Matters

<https://www.ccf.ny.gov/files/9013/8262/2751/AECFReporReadingGrade3.pdf>

Early Childhood Investments: Paving the Way for the Future Workforce

<https://www.investinwork.org/-/.../Early%20Childhood%20Investments%20Paving%20...>