

Our Future Cape Fear

Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, and Pender Counties

Collaborative Case Study

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What is Our Future Cape Fear?

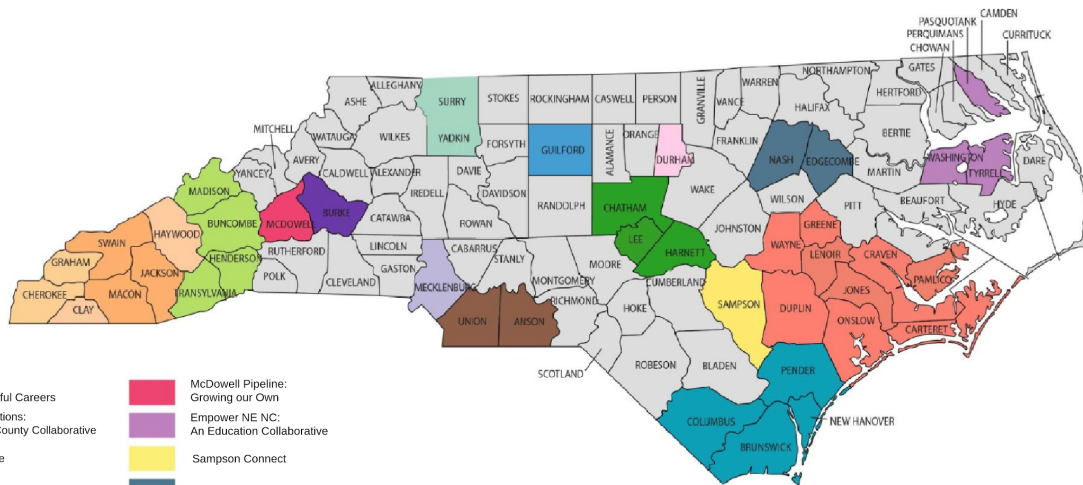
Our Future Cape Fear is a myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaborative (LEAC) that works to increase resources for local education service providers and their efforts to bolster educational attainment in the Cape Fear region. The group’s participation in LEAC programming has informed its understanding of the barriers young people and adult learners face in obtaining credentials. With this knowledge, the collaborative can tailor its efforts to help existing organizations reach the shared goal of increasing credential attainment by 8 percent.





Relationships and Connections: Primary Partners

myFutureNC Local Educational Collaboratives



- Our Future Cape Fear: A Roadmap to Meaningful Careers
- Central Carolina Connections: Chatham, Harnett, Lee County Collaborative
- Queen City Collaborative
- OurFutureE3NC Educate, Equip, Excel
- GuilfordJobs2030
- AchieveHIGHTS!
- Land of Sky Education & Workforce Collaborative
- Durham Opportunity Collaborative
- McDowell Pipeline: Growing our Own
- Empower NE NC: An Education Collaborative
- Sampson Connect
- #workHERE
- Surry-Yadkin_IMPACT
- Our Future in UNISON
- Work in Burke

Voyage

Empowers youth and operates programs to reduce youth violence. Serves as the fiscal agent for the collaborative.

Cape Fear Workforce Development Board

Connects job seekers and employers, providing youth and adults skills training and work opportunities.

UNC Wilmington Office of Continuing and Professional Education

Works to boost student retention by helping students determine their pathways toward career success.





Practices and Outcomes

Our Future Cape Fear was founded to coordinate disparate regional efforts to boost educational attainment in the region. Stakeholders who work directly with youth, university students, and adult learners have come together to understand and address existing barriers to educational attainment.

“We did a fishbone diagram exercise at one of the LEAC forums where we had to keep asking ourselves what barriers to obtaining credentials students were facing,” says Genna Wirth, executive director for Voyage. “After we came up with one reason, we were prompted to ask why, and then why again. During the exercise, we learned that you have to ask ‘why’ three or four times before we can get to the real root of the problem.”

That fishbone diagram illustrated to the LEAC that the main barrier to educational attainment in the region was not a lack of service providers. Rather, the main barrier was the lack of capacity service providers had to coordinate programs and provide better information to their populations about essential steps for their educational journeys.

Currently, the collaborative serves as a convening space for service providers in the region—primarily Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors, nonprofit leaders, and recruitment officers at educational institutions. Meetings are designed to help these professionals access and provide relevant information to their target populations. For example, the collaborative provides age-specific and goal-specific information on credentialing pathways for the region’s job-seekers. This focus on building the capacity of, and collaboration across, existing service providers has proven fruitful for this LEAC, which has also hosted learning opportunities for service providers on navigating the completion process for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA completion goal is part of myFutureNC’s scorecard for the region.

To ensure their activities meet the needs of their member organizations, Our Future Cape Fear developed a database of agencies working on educational attainment. “Our database intake form is comprehensive,” says Wirth, “and it requires organizations to specify who they serve, what they’re working on, and what challenges they face.”



Policies and Other Barriers

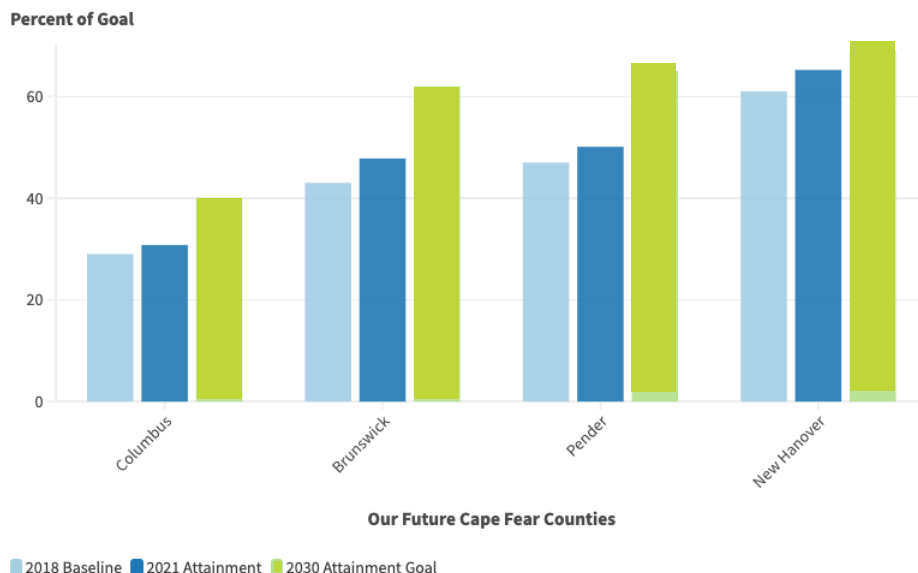
Wirth says proudly that participating as a LEAC “has pushed us to think about the best model for increasing educational attainment in our region and helps us dissect emerging challenges as we continue to operate as a group.” But the work has presented challenges, too. One barrier faced by the collaborative is how to track its success. “It is difficult to track progress and measure our success when dealing with many service providers who have different definitions of credentials and attainment,” says Lashauna Parker, youth programs manager for the Cape Fear Workforce Development Board. Mitchell Bloomer, director of continuing and professional development for UNC Wilmington, agrees. “We don’t yet have a shared understanding of what counts as a credential and how that tracks against our greater goal,” Bloomer says. “Developing that shared understanding is the next challenge to address.”



Resource Flows and Sustainability

The collaborative has focused its time together on identifying gaps and barriers and designing programming to help regional nonprofits and service providers in their efforts to increase educational attainment in their target populations. Moving forward, the LEAC recognizes it needs strategic investments, including recruiting a full-time director, to increase its capacity and operationalize its goals. “We want to ensure we always have a reliable fiscal agent, committed partners, and a sustainable steering committee,” says Wirth. That takes a strong, funded backbone organization.

myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives
Measuring Progress





Mental Models and Power Dynamics

Like other LEACs, Our Future Cape Fear realized during its early days that the region needed greater collaboration among current program providers rather than additional programming. That breakthrough thinking has allowed a small, but mighty group to create space for “real talk” and meaningful partnerships with existing organizations.

