

Central Carolina

Chatham, Lee and Harnett Counties

Collaborative Case Study

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What is Central Carolina Collaborative?

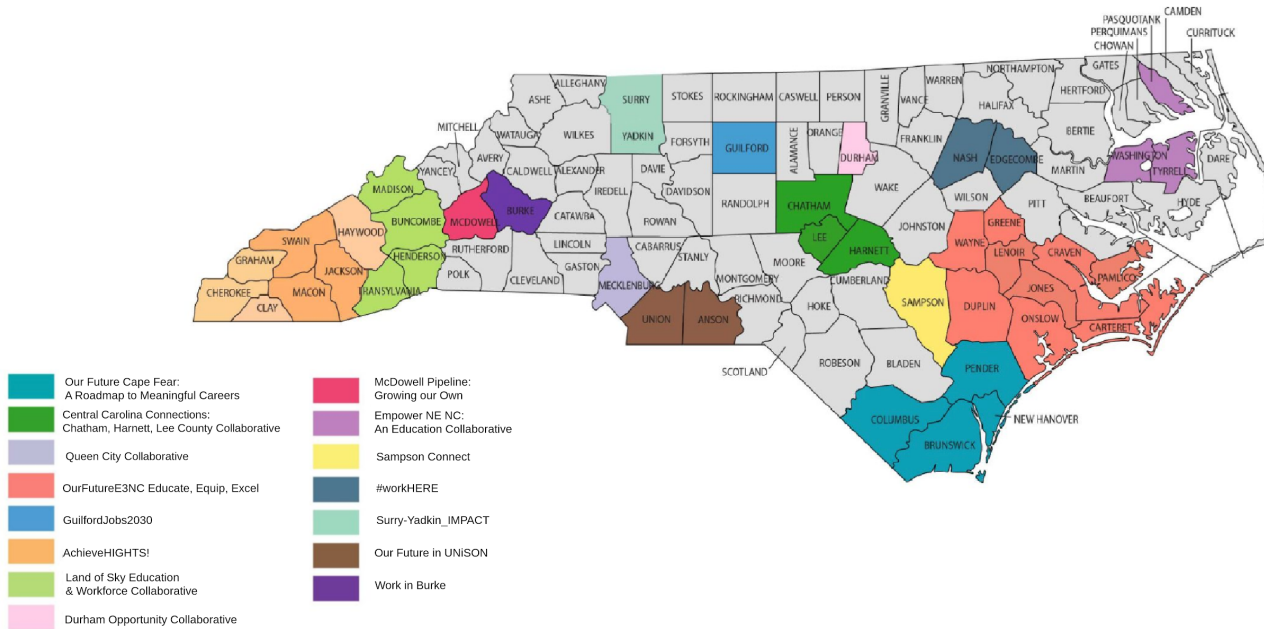
The Central Carolina Collaborative is a tri-county myFuture Local Educational Attainment Collaborative (LEAC) including educational and youth-centered agencies in Chatham, Lee, and Harnett counties committed to increasing educational attainment in the region. The collaborative focuses on meaningfully connecting youth to experiences and programs that increase their enrollment in post-secondary credentials and curricula. The collaborative engages the K-12 system, community college, youth-empowerment organizations, and private-sector partners to ensure that pathways and curricula meet the emerging needs of employers in the rapidly changing region.





Relationships and Connections: Primary Partners

myFutureNC Local Educational Collaboratives



Central Carolina Community College

Connects high school students with dual-enrollment courses, credentials, and curricula that will lead to a productive career path.

Boys and Girls Clubs

Engages teens in youth pre-apprenticeship programming that leads to meaningful employment and career progress.

Chatham County Schools

Strengthens educational opportunities for students in grades K-12.





Practices and Outcomes

The collaborative has devoted time to building strong partnerships between youth-serving organizations and Central Carolina Community College in order to support pathways to employment in the region's fast-evolving industrial landscape. Also, it has focused on communicating about the status quo and understanding where changes in policies and practices can be made. "The LEAC has allowed us to be nimble in identifying where we can improve and what sorely needs to change," says Sara Newcomb, executive director of secondary partnerships for Central Carolina Community College. "The LEAC has energized our K-12 partners to think about how we can do things differently."

The collaborative's education partners have shifted their practices to allow youth to explore various careers to figure out what they are interested in, compared to previous models of youth workforce engagement that were not as flexible. "How we view economic development through programming, pre-apprenticeships, and internships is changing," says Newcomb. "We're helping students find a purpose early instead of just pursuing a curriculum. This is a huge shift in our practice. Instead of forcing a student to self-identify their interests at the onset, we give that student deep exploration opportunities and flexibility to determine pathways of interest."

Through resource sharing, bolstering dual-enrollment programs, and increased engagement with K-12 partners, Central Carolina Collaborative has been able to experiment with smaller initiatives that recruit students from under-represented backgrounds into career readiness programs. "The collaborative has been valuable because it has allowed us to allocate time for true collaboration and experimentation," says Meghan Brown, associate vice president of advancement and government relations for Central Carolina Community College. "We can try new things because we now understand that failure isn't really a failure—it's an opportunity to learn."



Policies and Other Barriers

The main challenge for community-based partners such as the Boys and Girls Clubs is to secure funding to sustain programs such as Youthforce, which provides early exposure to work opportunities for students. Grants are not available in perpetuity, and the collaborative needs funders that will support the program.

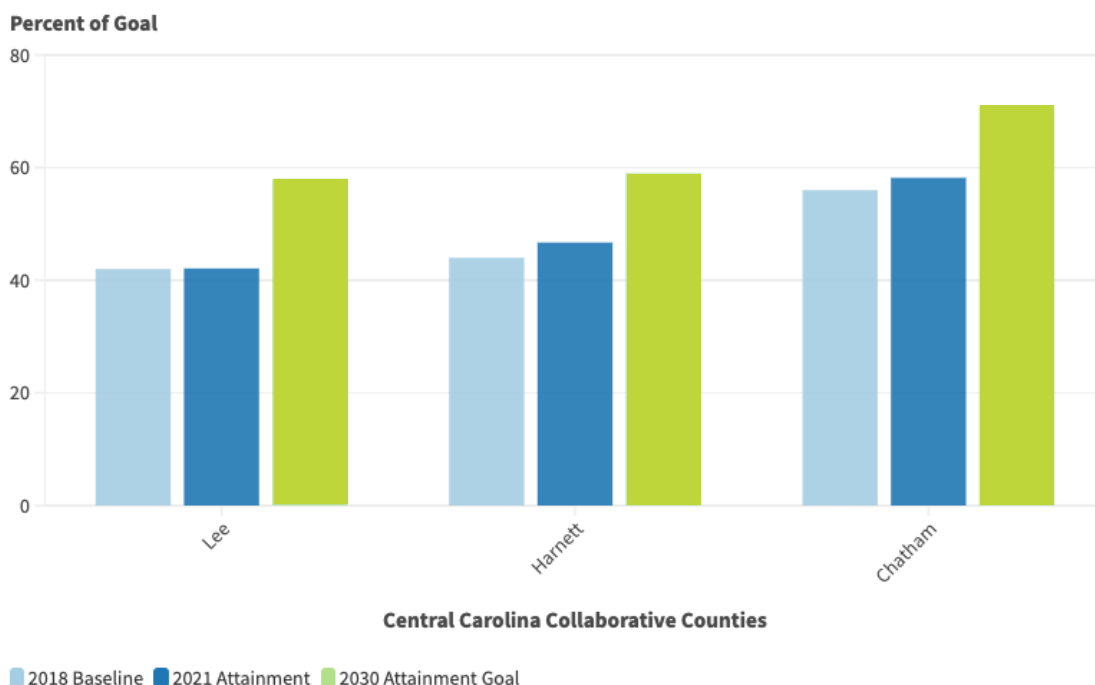
Additional funding would allow the collaborative to hire and retain full-time staff who can build meaningful relationships with the students. This is where the collaborative has the greatest opportunity for impact. But often, the “chicken and egg” nature of funding means that this is an insurmountable barrier. “It’s hard because if you don’t have a person hired, you can’t get funding, and you can’t hire that person without the funding,” says Sarah Womack, CEO of the Boays and Girls Club of Central Carolina. Currently, the Central Carolina Collaborative is navigating this hurdle by structuring its organizations to maximize existing staff capacity so that the work can continue.



Resource Flows and Sustainability

Central North Carolina is rapidly changing, with new industry partners coming into the region with new and different workforce needs. As a result, the tri-county collaborative will continue to work to align emerging industrial needs with the pathways available through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and the community college. “The biggest question the collaborative will continue to address is ‘Are we preparing pathways to meet the growing needs of industry in our region?’ says Newcomb. The collaborative will also work on formalizing its partnerships with the private sector through advisory boards so that businesses are invested in the curriculum and program design.

myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives Measuring Progress





Mental Models and Power Dynamics

Participation in the LEAC pushed the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Carolina to “think about how we can serve kids not only through 12th grade, but also beyond the age of 18, as these young people pursue post-secondary opportunities and join the workforce,” says Womack.

Before the pandemic, education and workforce agencies tended to build programs and wait for the students to come. The pandemic and the collaborative’s work as a LEAC shifted the mental model on program design. Instead of creating catch-all, broad programs, the collaborative now focuses on creating tailored and targeted programs, outreach efforts, and resources to engage a more diverse group of students. “The goal is to reach demographic populations that we’ve previously not been able to reach,” Brown says.



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