

Empower NENC

Pasquotank, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties

Collaborative Case Study

“Working as a collaborative helps us think outside of our own institutional silos.”

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What is Empower NENC?

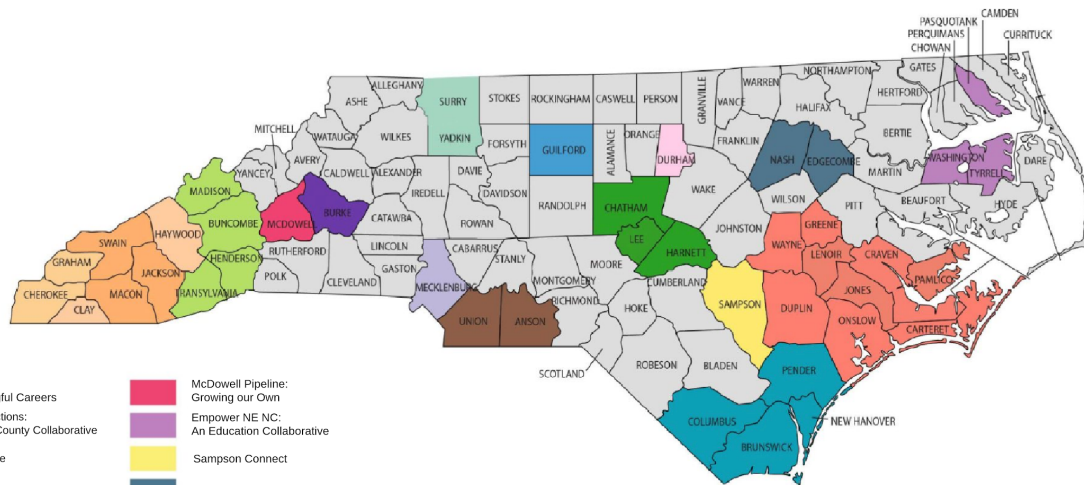
Empower NENC is a myFuture Local Educational Attainment Collaborative (LEAC) focused on increasing credential and educational attainment in the northeastern region of North Carolina. By coordinating programs, resources, and relationships, the collaborative reduces duplication of effort and can reach more people than a single agency could.





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

NENC Career Pathways

Serves as a connector among local school systems, community colleges, and employers to establish clear pipelines and strong relationships in the workforce development space.

Elizabeth City State University

Connects students with targeted resources to increase retention and establish successful career pathways.

Washington County Schools Career and Technical Education (CTE) program

Provides students with the technical, academic, and job-related knowledge and skills they need for success. Aligns secondary and post-secondary education with labor market demand.



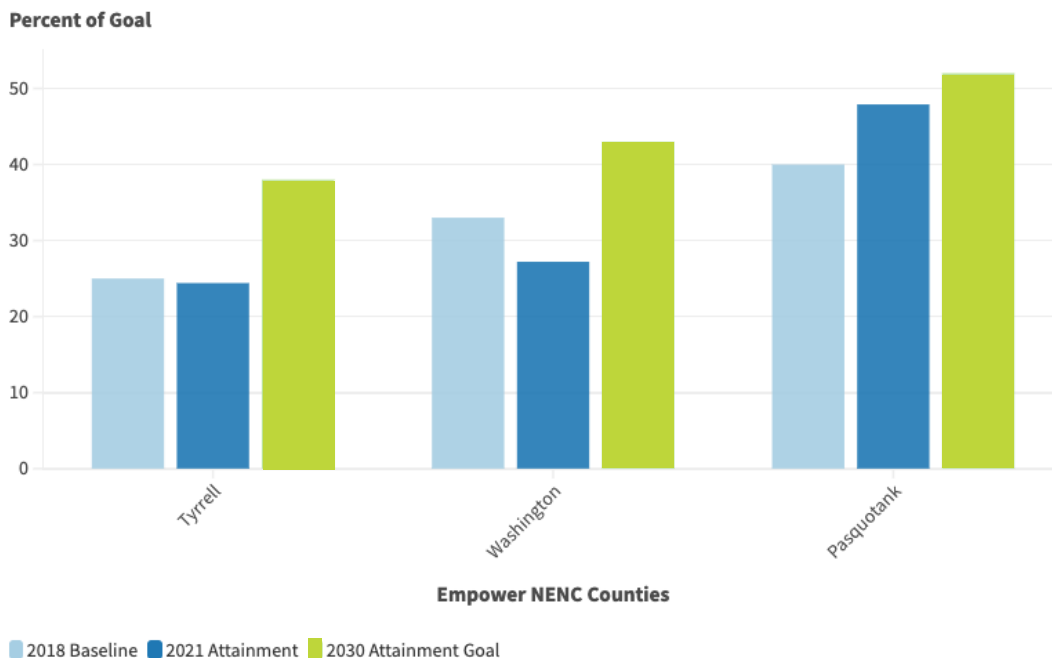


Practices and Outcomes

Empower NENC convenes the region's CTE programs, four-year post-secondary institutions, and workforce development organizations to catalog each organization's efforts to increase educational attainment in the region. "Our region has not always had the experience of all relevant organizations working together toward a shared goal," says Gary Brown, vice chancellor for student affairs and advancement at Elizabeth City State University. This often meant that individual organizations competed for the same grants and other resources. "For all the stakeholders to come together and be a part of this LEAC collaborative is a leap forward," Brown says. "We are gaining a shared understanding of our work and the bigger picture beyond our individual contributions to the space."

One of the collaborative's primary ways to stay on the same page is through a website (<https://www.empowerenc.com>) that captures all the participating organizations' programs, resources, and information in one place. The site is a manifestation of the improved coordination among local groups. "In the past, there's been a lack of coordination among stakeholders," says Brown, "but the website is a one-stop shop for information."

myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives Measuring Progress



Empower NENC is also focused on reaching historically excluded groups in the region. Specifically, the collaborative is working to ensure that its website and other resources are translated into Spanish and that relevant materials are distributed through organizations trusted by groups with low educational attainment.

Historically, most work being done to increase educational attainment in Guilford County has operated at a system-wide level. However, some residents can find these systems difficult to access or navigate. A hyperlocal focus allows community leaders to recruit and provide comprehensive and customized support to people seeking opportunities. In turn, hyperlocal program site insights can inform the broader systems and adjust their services as needed.



Resource Flows and Sustainability

Each representative in Empower NENC has a demanding day job, and participation in the LEAC collaborative requires time and effort. Therefore, understanding which organizations are doing similar work—and which gaps should be the primary focus—has become critical when deciding how to invest time and other resources in the collaborative. “This work is a marathon,” Brown says. “Continuing the race is a big challenge while doing our own work and keeping on task with the collaborative’s goals.”

Tamara Wrighton, CTE director for Washington County Schools, agrees. “We have so many tasks in our daily work,” she says, “and having to shift focus from task to task and topic to topic makes it difficult to maintain a big-picture perspective on common threads every time we meet as a collaborative.”

To alleviate that barrier to success, the LEAC needs to build ground-level capacity so that strategy and tactics don’t fall on the same people. A staff position to maintain the day-to-day work of the collaborative would help stakeholders stay on track as they navigate their other responsibilities.

Financial resources to implement strategies are also important, and the region is heavily under-resourced. Brandi Bragg, workforce connector for NENC Career Pathways, says, “Geographic equity has to be considered when making strategic investments in educational attainments across the state. Focusing on securing programmatic grants takes time away from other mission-critical collaborative tasks.” Strategic fiscal investments in organizations serving as backbones for community efforts in educational attainment will help this collaborative continue to grow its relationships and boost information-sharing, leading to better results for the region.



Mental Models and Power Dynamics

Relationships are the infrastructure of this LEAC's work. "We had all been working with each other or seeing each other through our work at various points before we joined the collaborative," says Bragg. However, the group's regular meetings have helped participants deepen relationships with key people in organizations that can support each other's work. "We all look at this work through our own lens," Brown says. "If we work at a high school, then we focus on CTE work; if we work at a four-year institution, it's about recruiting and retaining students. But working as a collaborative helps us think outside of our own institutional silos. When you spend this amount of time with the people doing similar work, you deepen your understanding and develop a true appreciation for everything happening across the board."

Previously, individual staff who knew each other from various organizations would sometimes collaborate. However, staff turnover prevented lasting relationships from being formed. The collaborative now prioritizes building relationships across organizations, an approach that transcends individual staff. As a result, they are confident that the LEAC will be sustainable despite staff turnover.

