

# Achieve HIGHTS

Jackson, Haywood, Macon, Swain, Graham, Clay, and Cherokee Counties

## Collaborative Case Study

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### What is Achieve HIGHTS?

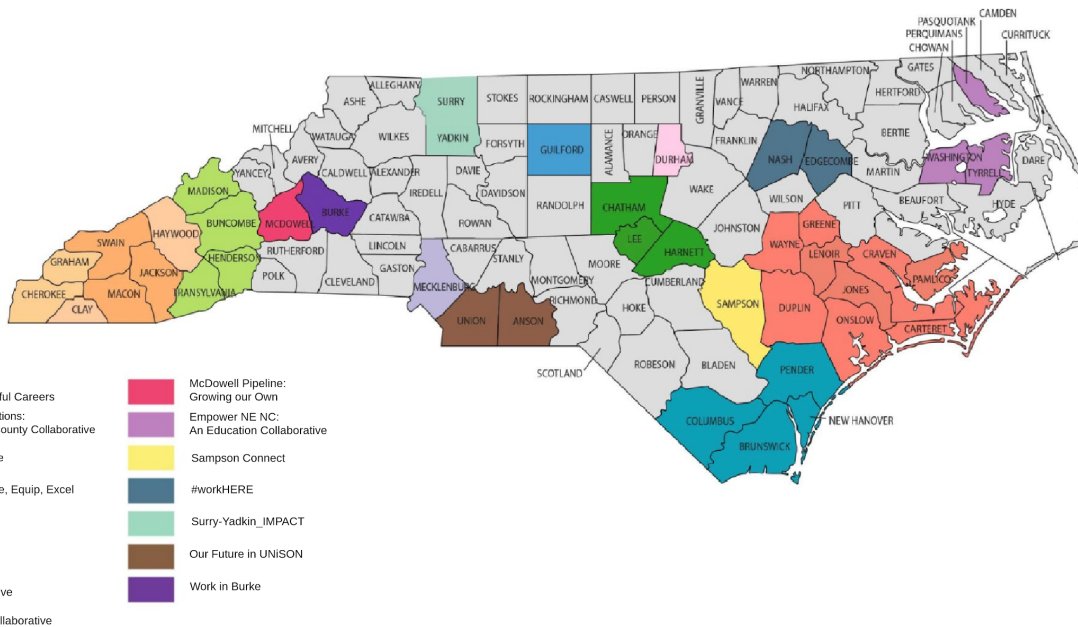
Achieve HIGHTS is a myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaborative (LEAC) focused on reducing barriers to educational attainment in the farthest western counties of North Carolina. Achieve HIGHTS seeks to address the region’s systemic rural challenges that serve as barriers to educational attainment, particularly those related to transportation and generational poverty. After beginning its work as a LEAC (Local Educational Attainment Collaborative), the collaborative chose to participate in the Our State, Our Work: Connecting Young Adults to Their Future (OSOW) program to further examine barriers and identify ways to support young adults engage in postsecondary education and meaningful work.





# Relationships and Connections: Primary Partners

## myFutureNC Local Educational Collaboratives



### HIGHTS

(Helping Inspire Gifts of Hope, Trust, and Service) Works with Western North Carolina youth to help them use their abilities to find meaningful pathways to work through service projects, job training, and life skills coaching.

### Southwestern Workforce Development Board

Provides selected populations with resources to find meaningful work in the region's industry. Housed in the Council of Governments, the board works with other organizations across county governments to find cross-sector solutions to systemic challenges related to mental health, housing, and transportation that serve as barriers to employment.

### First United Methodist Church

Provides resources for participants, space, and referrals as a faith-based partner to other organizations.

### Southwestern Community College and Career Readiness

Provides post-secondary credentials and responds to referrals of young adults who need support in earning a high school diploma and pursuing post-secondary certifications.

### 30th Judicial District Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Alliance

Works with local domestic violence sexual assault programs, area agencies, and the criminal justice system to provide outreach, advocacy, mental health, and training services to empower survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

### Lyndon B. Johnson Civilian Conservation Job Corps Center

Helps eligible young people complete their high school education, train for and find employment, and access transitional support services as a residential program.





## Practices and Outcomes

Achieve HIGHTS coordinates efforts among school districts, community colleges, and nonprofits across Western North Carolina to increase high school graduation rates and post-secondary placements. “We focus on youth,” says David Garrett, workforce development director for the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments, “and the LEAC is a great avenue for us to work with kids who are still in school before they become out-of-school students.” LEAC programming led Achieve HIGHTS to dedicate resources to retaining current students, a focus area not included in previous funding mandates for the Workforce Development Board.

To reach students while they are still in high school, the collaborative engages students in a job fair, hosted by Southwestern Community College. The job fair helps students directly connect credential education with good salaries and meaningful work. “The job fair not only exposes our kids to the various pathways out there,” Garrett says, “but also makes the students feel more comfortable in the community college environment. When they enroll, they’ll be more likely to seek resources and connect with the right people.”



## Policies and Other Barriers

Achieve HIGHTS is facing systemic barriers that are typical of many rural area. “Systemic challenges like homelessness, mental health, and addiction are difficult for a workforce development agency alone to handle,” Lamp says. “Our charge is to keep up with our partners and ensure they have the resources they need to succeed.”

Through the collaborative’s participation in the OSOW program, Achieve HIGHTS has discovered that it’s not enough to focus on simply increasing educational attainment; barriers to that attainment must also be addressed. Toward that end, the collaborative has engaged employers and participated in a mini-grant process to develop evidence-based practices for reaching young people.



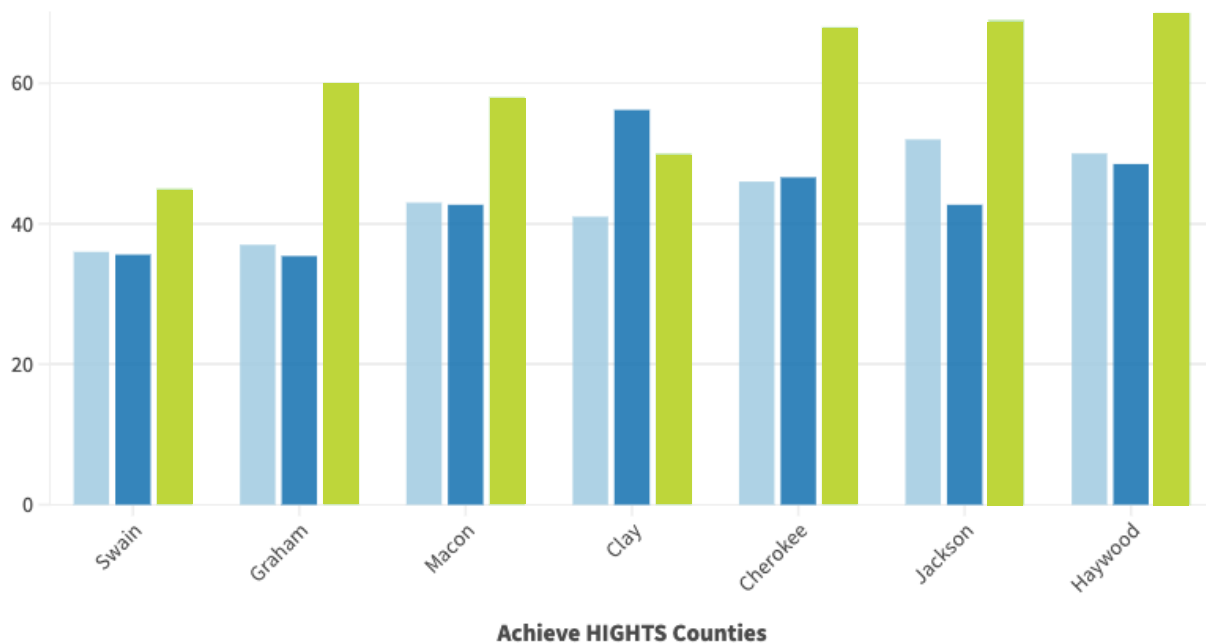


# Resource Flows and Sustainability

Achieve HIGHTS plans to play an increasing role in supporting educational attainment in Western North Carolina in the years to come. Looking forward, the collaborative will hire an administrative project manager who will plan meetings, engage stakeholders, track projects, and measure outcomes. Participating in OSOW has provided some additional capacity, but that program ends in 2023. “The LEAC has been instrumental in giving us a framework to act on what we discuss in our meetings,” Lamp says. “Previously, our meetings didn’t produce action. Keeping that momentum going by building capacity on the administrative side will be essential.”

## myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives Measuring Progress

Percent of Goal



■ 2018 Baseline ■ 2021 Attainment ■ 2030 Attainment Goal





# Mental Models and Power Dynamics

Achieve HIGHTS credits its participation in LEAC programming for the expansion of its relationships in the region. “We’ve brought in organizations that are otherwise overlooked because they are not traditional workforce organizations,” says Linda Lamp, who works with the Southwestern Workforce Development Board.

This includes increased participation of industry groups, which expands students’ exposure to industry partners while they’re still in high school—increasing the likelihood of those students earning a credential and parlaying that into a successful career. Also, the collaborative has deepened its relationships with community colleges so that they can offer targeted programming and strengthen the pipeline of graduates who are career-ready.

In addition, the collaborative has built relationships with mental health service providers that have a deeper understanding of youth mental health challenges and can design pathways to address them. When organizations make the mental shift from feeling that they must provide everything to their constituents to instead relying on trusted partners that have specific areas of expertise, they can leverage resources and boost their impact.



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