

# Work in Burke

Burke County

## Collaborative Case Study

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### What is Work in Burke?

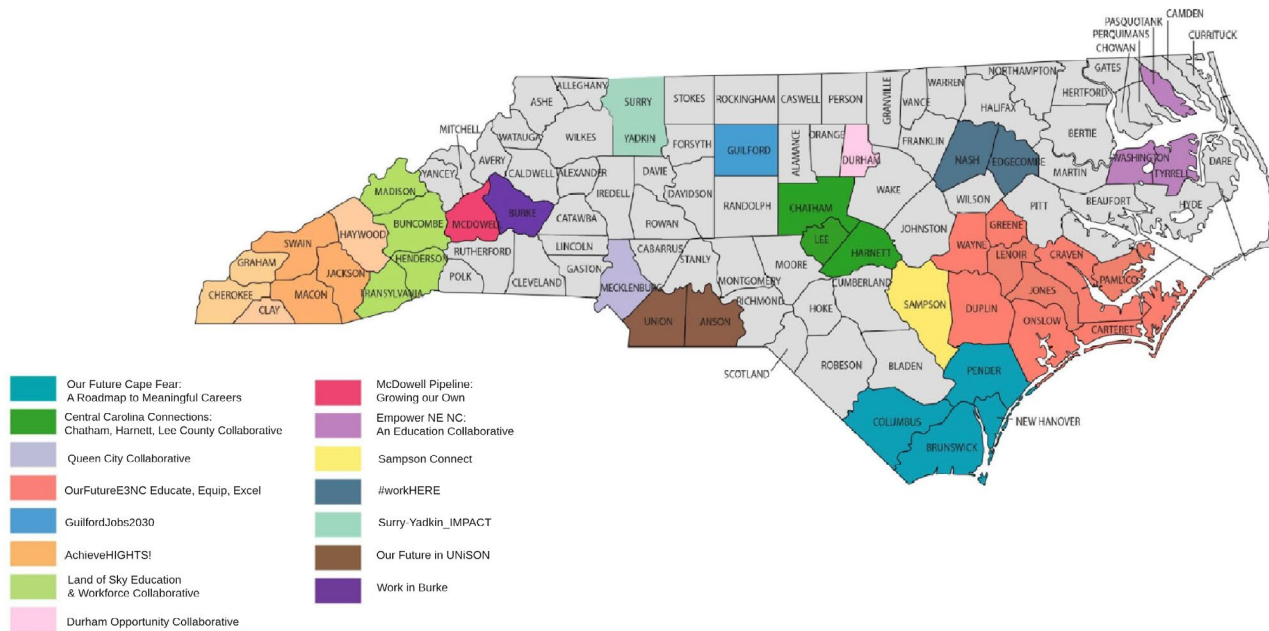
Work in Burke is a myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaborative (LEAC) that seeks to help young people in Burke County continue their education and find living-wage employment after high school. Participation in the LEAC informed Work in Burke’s programs that connect high school students with professional development, mentorship opportunities, and wraparound services as they complete internships with local employers.





# Relationships and Connections: Primary Partners

## myFutureNC Local Educational Collaboratives



### Work in Burke

Serves as the nonprofit partner that recruits students for participation in internships, provides professional development opportunities, manages relationships with employers, and engages mentors.

### The Industrial Commons

Serves as the nonprofit partner that houses Work in Burke and increases worker agency in the manufacturing industries for Burke County.

### Burke Development Inc.

Helps businesses meet their workforce needs.

### NCWorks

Provides career and employment tools for job seekers.

**Western Piedmont Community College** Provides credential and educational resources to boost the workforce and meet the region's growing industrial needs.

### Burke County Public Schools

Offers Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses to increase student placement in Burke County's workforce.





## Practices and Outcomes

Work in Burke provides several internship programs, including Opportunity Internship (OPT-IN). This internship program recruits high school students for professional development, mentoring opportunities, and summer placements with key employers in Burke County. The program served 15 young people last year, and 30 students are participating this year. Work in Burke has 18 engaged employer participants and nearly 60 mentors providing guidance and support to the students.

The LEAC has found that the biggest challenge in transitioning OPT-IN from its initial pilot phase to an operational phase is the need to quickly build organizational capacity for learning and evaluation. “It takes four years to know if something like the OPT-IN program is working,” says Alan Wood, president and CEO of Burke Development. “The early years are difficult because they require constant changes and adaptation.”

Work in Burke also offers training and opportunities for individuals not in high school, including through the Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) program. JET matches participants with local employers who meet their quality employment standards and offer 42 hours of paid time in professional development courses and connection to a community mentor. This means employees can increase their educational attainment while working.

The Industrial Sewing Program (ISP), offered by the Carolina Textile District, is another program available through Work in Burke. Course topics include textiles, basic industrial sewing techniques, fabric structures and types, machine knowledge, tools, use of tech packs, and other essential skills. Both JET and ISP focus on connecting individuals to quality employment with family-sustaining wages and connections to wraparound support services and educational opportunities. Participants may enroll in both programs if they choose.

A strong level of buy-in among partners is made possible by the relationships fostered through the collaborative’s participation in LEAC programming. Organizing the work as a LEAC made it possible for the collaborative to formalize the internship program, secure funding, and designate staff to build capacity. “Our main point of contact through the LEAC helped us connect with the right organizations,” says Crisp, “and the programming provided us with critical research on capacity-building that guided us in hiring two full-time staff to help us coordinate our internship program.”



The LEAC structure also helped Work in Burke navigate the grant funding process for personnel hires and program expansion and learn how to build a sustainable program that could survive retirements and turnover in partner organizations. “Through our programming, we realized the importance of bringing on full-time people to work on this initiative,” Crisp says. “It takes a lot to manage dozens of young people going through training and internships while fostering relationships with employers, mentors, and partner organizations.” In addition, “We want to ensure that our alumni stay engaged in school or with a job years after they graduate from our program,” says Wood. “To do so, we need data and ways to engage with them years after they complete their internships. That takes capacity.”

Regarding the value of LEAC participation, Wood says, “We may have gotten to where we are without the LEAC, but the LEAC reduced our learning curve.”

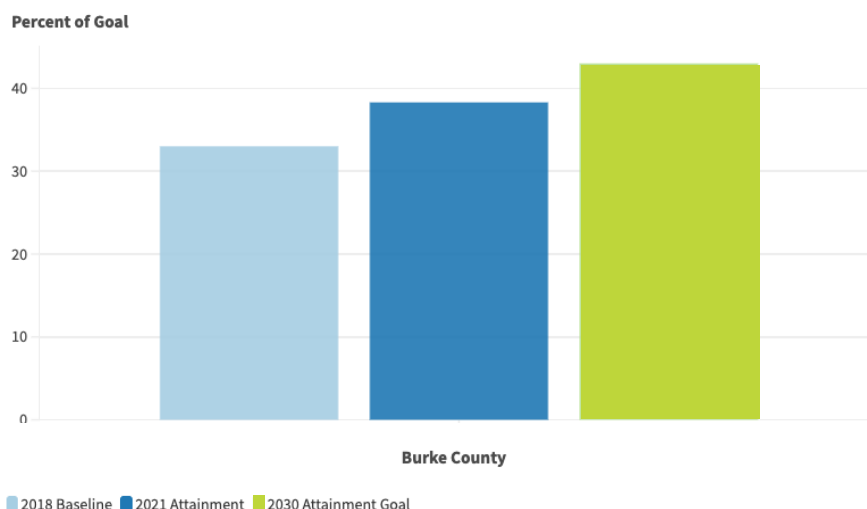


## Policies and Other Barriers

Participation as a LEAC provided Work in Burke with formal structures and models to help them identify barriers and prioritize solutions. This catapulted the work but did not solve the primary challenge: most funding comes from project grants. “We’re writing anywhere from five to fifteen grants a month,” says Sara Chester, co-executive director of The Industrial Commons.

Work in Burke recognizes it needs local government organizations to help sustain the existing programs so grant funding can be used for expansion and new projects. Although the idea of seeking reliable funds to serve as a backbone organization is daunting, this challenge doesn’t reduce the collaborative’s confidence in the collective impact model. In fact, it has had the opposite effect. Work in Burke notes that its successes are generating increased local interest in its programs.

**myFutureNC Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives**  
Measuring Progress





## Resource Flows and Sustainability

The collaborative partners meet regularly to strategize on grant applications, operational details of the internship programs, and recruitment of students and employers. Work in Burke seeks in those meetings to develop reliable funding that sustains existing programs, increase operational capacity to grow the number of program participants, and encourage mental shifts among employers to provide needed flexibility when working with young people as interns and employees.

The LEAC has extended its work by participating in the Our State Our Work (OSOW) program led by the nclMPACT Initiative. It has resulted in significant progress in employer engagement with young adults ages 16 - 24 who are not in school or working (Opportunity Youth). Work in Burke has used an OSOW mini-grant to develop programming and increase the effectiveness of its outreach to these young adults. This collaborative hopes to reduce the number of Opportunity Youth by 25 percent in the region. "That's 700 new workers being productive and living a better life than they would otherwise," says Wood.



## Mental Model and Power Dynamics

The LEAC wants to move toward a reality where every high school student has at least one mentor who will accompany them throughout their early life journey and help them meet their potential. It also recognizes that sometimes "it takes a village." Crisp reflects, "One of our employers realized that their interns needed more support during the onboarding process to figure out simple things their direct managers didn't have time to help them with. We helped that employer set up a buddy system so our interns would have a buddy in the workplace to answer questions and help them better adjust during the onboarding process."



John M Belk  
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2 million by 2030