

North Carolina Community Colleges  
**Putting Education to Work**  
2018-2022 Strategic Plan

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**NC COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES**  
CREATING SUCCESS





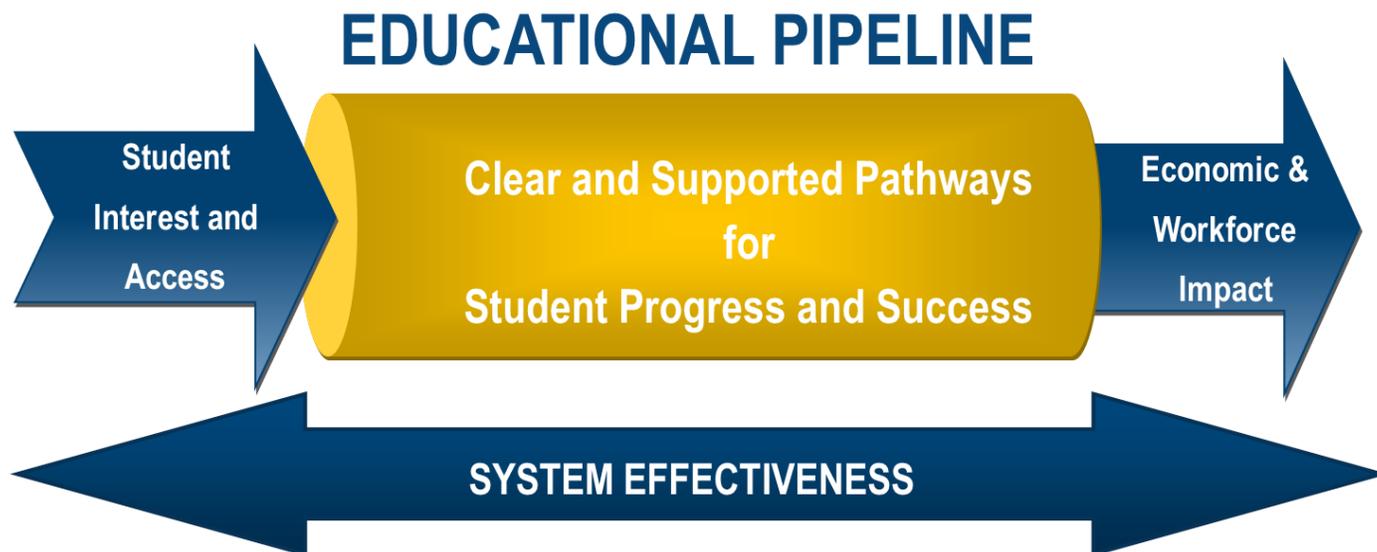
To open the door to high quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing:

- Education, training and retraining for the workforce including basic skills and literacy education, occupational and pre-baccalaureate programs.
- Support for economic development through services to and in partnership with business and industry and in collaboration with the University of North Carolina System and private colleges and universities.
- Services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life.

*“The only valid philosophy for North Carolina is the philosophy of total education; a belief in the incomparable worth of all human beings, whose claims upon the state are equal before the law and equal before the bar of public opinion; whose talents (however great or however limited or however different from the traditional) the state needs and must develop to the fullest possible degree. That is why the doors to the institutions of North Carolina’s system of community colleges must never be closed to anyone of suitable age who can learn what they teach. We must take people where they are and carry them as far as they can go within the assigned functions of the system.”*

Dr. W. Dallas Herring  
Chairman, State Board of Education, 1957-77  
“Father of the Community College System”

# Introduction



By 2020, 67% of jobs in North Carolina are projected to require postsecondary education. Yet in 2015, only an estimated 48% of North Carolina's prime working-age (18-64) adults had a postsecondary degree, certification, license or other credential of workplace value. In response to this urgent need to significantly increase educational attainment, the State Board of Community Colleges initiated in February 2017 a strategic planning process aimed at improving how community colleges provide high-quality, accessible educational opportunities to North Carolinians.

Throughout this planning process, our System focused on four themes related to comprehensively improving the educational pipeline provided by community colleges:

- **Student Interest and Access:** How do we overcome lack of interest and barriers to higher education access to increase the percentage of North Carolinians pursuing postsecondary education?
- **Clear and Supported Pathways for Student Progress and Success:** How do we better provide students the instruction and support needed to successfully attain a degree/credential and enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year institution in a timely manner?
- **Economic and Workforce Impact:** How do we ensure that our students have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the state's economic and workforce needs?
- **System Effectiveness:** How do we support a cohesive system of nimble, community-driven colleges and empowered faculty and staff? How do we improve institutional capacity to support the System's mission and reduce operational risk?

# Strategic Planning Process

## Environmental Scan

- Research of demographic and economic trends affecting community colleges.
- Review of 58 community colleges' strategic plans to understand what is important to our System.
- Initial stakeholder engagement, including students, businesses, legislative leaders, and community college presidents and professional associations.

## Plan Development

- Teams co-chaired by System Office and community college leaders focused on four themes: Student Interest & Access; Clear & Supported Pathways for Student Progress & Success; Economic & Workforce Impact; System Effectiveness.
- Included participation of partners and customers.
- Reviewed and revised by the State Board of Community Colleges.

## Plan Implementation and Adjustments

- State Board approval, February 2018
- The State Board will monitor and evaluate progress toward achievement of the plan's goals, and will make adjustments as needed.

## The Plan's Uses

- Promote a clear and consistent message about North Carolina's community colleges.
- Guide development of NC Community College System's budget and legislative priorities.
- Promote accountability.
- Aid in making decisions and focusing on priorities.
- Inspire our community college "family" and promote cohesion.



# Student Interest and Access

**GOAL: Increase the percentage of North Carolinians, particularly within underserved populations, pursuing and easily accessing education or training through North Carolina community colleges.**

**1.1. Improve the understanding and perceived value of educational opportunities, including lifelong learning, offered by NC community colleges.**

- 1.1.1. Implement a comprehensive, system-wide marketing and communications plan that focuses on the value of community colleges and promotes the image of the System and our institutions.
- 1.1.2. Strengthen collaboration with education, community, business, and workforce partners for outreach and to support students as they transition through a seamless system of education in North Carolina.
- 1.1.3. Reconnect former community college students to education and training opportunities that foster continued educational and career growth.

**1.2. Increase student interest and success in industries experiencing skills gaps.**

- 1.2.1. Market the value of technical education and workforce training for job/careers.

**1.3. Identify and reduce access barriers for all prospective students, particularly among underserved populations.**

- 1.3.1. Improve and augment existing financial assistance programs and services to better assist students with educational costs, particularly costs beyond tuition and fees (e.g., books, transportation, child care, etc.).
- 1.3.2. Promote more flexible scheduling and instructional delivery formats to reach non-traditional students.

**1.4. Improve the student experience and increase enrollment by simplifying enrollment policies, processes, and communications.**

- 1.4.1. Re-envision the application and enrollment process for community colleges.
- 1.4.2. Improve initial advising to include career exploration and improve navigation of the enrollment process.

# Highlighted Activities



**Career Coaches** – The Career Coach program places community college career coaches in high schools to help students set career goals and identify postsecondary education or training programs to achieve those goals. The program complements other strategies to reach students early in the educational pipeline. The System is exploring ways to scale the program to increase career awareness and post-secondary education planning.

**Outreach and Awareness of Critical Career Pathways for NC** - Building on a new partnership with the Carolinas Association of General Contractors (CAGC), the System is exploring ways to promote community college programs in partnership with industry efforts to promote occupations that are hard to fill. The project with CAGC is developing modern messaging and tools to promote construction and contractor career pathways to high school students, veterans, underserved populations, and adult career changers. The lessons learned from this partnership will inform similar projects with other industries.

**Competency-Based Education** - CBE is an approach to designing academic programs with a focus on mastery of competencies at a personalized pace rather than time spent in a classroom. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment and progress at a personalized pace. A pilot competency-based program in Information Technology is under development.

# Clear & Supported Pathways for Student Progress and Success

**GOAL: Provide a continuum of education, training, advising, and support to help learners make informed decisions that lead to credentials and careers.**

**2.1. Provide timely and accurate career exploration and academic planning opportunities.**

- 2.1.1. Integrate career exploration and employer outreach for all audiences from the moment they engage.
- 2.1.2. Develop and support effective career planning practices for faculty and staff.

**2.2. Provide integrated, targeted support services that promote student success.**

- 2.2.1. Provide support for student academic concerns, including early alerts to increase retention.
- 2.2.2. Connect students to transportation, health, and other comprehensive services, drawing on both college and community resources to address non-academic barriers faced by students.

**2.3. Increase completion of credentials for successful transition to careers and/or further education.**

- 2.3.1. Simplify and streamline processes from entry through completion/ transfer, effectively incorporating multiple on and off ramps.
- 2.3.2. Refine foundational and developmental education strategies to accelerate student readiness for college-level instruction.
- 2.3.3. Validate students' prior learning and experience to minimize student costs and the time it takes to complete their educational goals.
- 2.3.4. Support effective advising and coaching to help students determine, pursue, and achieve their educational and career goals.
- 2.3.5. Promote guided educational pathways within broader career pathways.

**2.4. Reduce achievement gaps for underserved students.**

- 2.4.1. Help college employees understand and employ effective teaching/coaching strategies for all students, including those who are dealing with the impacts of poverty, trauma, addiction, mental illness, disabilities, and other challenges.

# Highlighted Activities



**Reinforced Instruction for Student Excellence**— Explores a new approach to increase enrollment and success in gateway-level math and English courses, which will in turn increase the number of students on a path to academic and career success. RISE proposes replacing the placement testing component of the multiple measures approach and using “co-requisite remediation,” in which developmental education courses are offered at the same time as college-level courses. National research supports co-requisite remediation, showing especially large improvements in success rates for first-generation college students and minority students.



**Credit for Prior Learning and Experience** – To shorten the time needed for students to complete their education and achieve credentials, the System is expanding its efforts to enable community colleges to award college credit for a variety of learning options. These include credit for military service, continuing education to curriculum-credit, credit for industry-recognized certifications, and portfolios for life and work experiences.



**Advising and Student Support Redesign** – The NCCCS Advising Redesign Team is developing an advising and student support vision and framework for the System to include implementation strategies for the 58 colleges. The vision: “Every student will be guided from pre-admission to completion with proactive/ appreciative advising and career, academic, and financial planning; timely communication; and integrated support and interventions.” The Redesign Team will identify college liaisons, identify NC standards and college best practices, and use a train-the-trainer model and toolkit to help colleges implement more successful advising strategies.

# Economic and Workforce Impact

**GOAL: Ensure the educational pipeline prepares a workforce possessing the interest, knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the needs of employers, now and into the future.**

**3.1. Collaborate with stakeholders to promote a workforce system that fosters innovation and establishes seamless connections among community colleges, K-12 education, universities, workforce and economic development partners, and business and industry.**

- 3.1.1. Identify and engage employers and relevant sources of data to determine high-demand occupations, program demand within the current labor market, and expected occupational earnings.
- 3.1.2. Partner with high schools, universities, and workforce development entities and engage with employers and industry associations (at the regional/local levels) to identify workforce needs and establish educational and training programs collaboratively and comprehensively.
- 3.1.3. Collaborate with workforce partners to benchmark successful state and national workforce systems.

**3.2. Offer relevant, high-quality instructional programs that meet the needs of business and industry for existing and future jobs.**

- 3.2.1. Provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality professional development to faculty and staff to stay informed about labor market and student support trends.
- 3.2.2. Articulate pathways for educational and professional growth within key industries through employer engagement.
- 3.2.3. Develop faculty capacity to conduct program review and learning outcomes assessment to promote continuous improvement of programs.
- 3.2.4. Integrate critical employability skills into all programs of study to better prepare students for today's work environment.
- 3.2.5. Modify the instructional funding model to ensure colleges have necessary resources to offer workforce training needed by their communities.

**3.3. Increase student access to work experience.**

- 3.3.1. Leverage partnerships to connect students with expanded work-based learning opportunities.
- 3.3.2. Modify policies and eliminate the barriers that impede access to apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities.

# Highlighted Activities



**Work-Based Learning** – Provides students with real-life work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop their employability. To develop a continuum of high-quality work-based learning for NC students and adult learners, the System is leveraging the transfer of ApprenticeshipNC and the State's participation on National Governors Association Policy Academy for Work-Based Learning. North Carolina's capacity to service business and industry with the complete toolbox of work-based learning options will be expanded by utilizing the 58 community colleges in the state.

**Industry Association Engagement** – In 2017, the System formed a group of statewide industry associations, the Council of Associations for Engagement, and asked a simple question: "What keeps your business members up at night?" The issues were many but focused on specific workforce issues such as turnover associated with the graying of the workforce, need for employability skills, perceptions of their industries, and the need for flexible short-term training. Going forward, the System is looking to expand its partnerships with statewide industry associations to address skill gaps, improve the alignment of curriculum to industry needs, and develop other solutions driven by business needs.

**Industry Recognized Credentials** – The NC Community College System is supporting students' attainment of industry-recognized credentials to improve their employability and career advancement. One key way is by seeking changes to the state funding formula for education and training to fully recognize the value of short-term training that leads to in-demand industry credentials. Another is by working with researchers and credentialing organizations to validate the significance of credentials in the workplace and improve the ability to capture data on community college students earning third-party credentials.

# System Effectiveness

**GOAL: Advance organizational effectiveness, operations, and decision-making to support a cohesive system of nimble, empowered, and community-driven colleges.**

**4.1. Ensure colleges and the System have access to technology and related infrastructure to meet student and institutional needs.**

- 4.1.1. Implement a sustainable, system-wide enterprise resources planning (ERP) solution that enables more consistent and efficient operations.
- 4.1.2. Sustain the current ERP infrastructure to prepare for transition to a modernized ERP.

**4.2. Improve decision-making through increased access to comprehensive, timely, and quality data.**

- 4.2.1. Ensure that core data needs are identified, defined, governed, and accurately reported.
- 4.2.2. Provide access to analytical and business intelligence tools needed to support timely reporting on student and institutional outcomes.

**4.3. Enhance and support workplace environments that value and engage employees and provide opportunities for growth and development.**

- 4.3.1. Assess and address the professional development needs across the System.
- 4.3.2. Advocate for competitive salaries and benefits for community college faculty and employees.

**4.4. Ensure policies, procedures, and processes facilitate System effectiveness and compliance.**

- 4.4.1. Routinely monitor and revise the State Board of Community Colleges Code to ensure policies are current and clear.
- 4.4.2. Facilitate collaboration between System Office and the NC Association of Community College Presidents on the establishment of standard policies and procedures required to meet System requirements and align with best practices.

## 4.5. Leverage partnerships and agreements to create efficiencies for the System as a whole.

- 4.5.1. Advocate for regional or system-wide procurement mechanisms to simplify processes.
- 4.5.2. Foster regional and system-wide collaborations among colleges.

## 4.6. Improve cohesiveness between colleges, professional associations, System Office, and partners.

- 4.6.1. Improve communication among all System entities and key partners.
- 4.6.2. Leverage community college professional associations to increase communication and problem-solving across our System.

## Highlighted Activities

**New Enterprise Resource Planning System** – After using the current ERP system for over 15 years, the System is planning for a modern technology platform to support the 58 community colleges and System Office. With input from thousands of individuals across the state with a stake in the future of community colleges, the ERP planning process involves rethinking the way North Carolina community colleges operate and provide instruction. Setting the stage for a modern ERP will enable the System to accelerate its education innovation efforts and support more efficient operations.

**Access to Quality Data and Analytics** – To support student success, encourage data-driven decision-making, and achieve operational efficiencies, the System is committed to increasing access to quality data and analytics. Two priorities for the System are improved data governance processes and designing the new ERP system with information needs clearly delineated.

**The Student Success Center** – Provides research-based support for the 58 community colleges to advance, scale, and sustain student success and completion efforts. Based on the NC Guided Pathways to Success Plan developed with college and partner support, the Student Success Center will provide comprehensive and customized resources to colleges to advance their student success efforts, including professional and organizational development, coaching, and technical assistance.

# Acknowledgements

This plan could not have been completed without valuable assistance from community college administrators, faculty and students, as well as our partners in business, workforce development, education, and local government. Thank you for your contributions to the plan and for your ongoing support in helping us achieve these goals.

## State Board of Community Colleges Strategic Planning Committee

- Clark Twiddy, Co-chair
- Jerry Vaughan, Co-chair
- Dr. Breeden Blackwell
- Bill McBrayer
- Ernest Pearson
- Ann Whitford

## Co-chairs of Strategic Plan Development Teams

- *Student Interest and Access:* Dr. Dennis King, President, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College; Jennifer Haygood, Acting President, NCCCS
- *Clear and Supported Pathways for Student Progress and Success:* Dr. Tracy Mancini, Vice President for Instruction and Student Support, Carteret Community College; Dr. Lisa Chapman, Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, NCCCS
- *Economic and Workforce Impact:* Dr. Maria Pharr, President, South Piedmont Community College; Maureen Little, Vice President of Economic Development, NCCCS
- *System Effectiveness:* Dr. Lawrence Rouse, President, James Sprunt Community College; Elizabeth Grovenstein, Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, NCCCS; Jim Parker, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, NCCCS

## Strategic Plan Coordinating Team for NCCCS

- Anne Bacon, Director of Strategic Planning and Policy
- Kelly Barretto, Executive Assistant
- Sondra Jarvis, Executive Assistant
- Alexis Lockett, Special Projects Coordinator
- Dr. Matthew Meyer, Associate Vice President for Educational Innovations
- Bill Schneider, Associate Vice President for Research and Performance Management

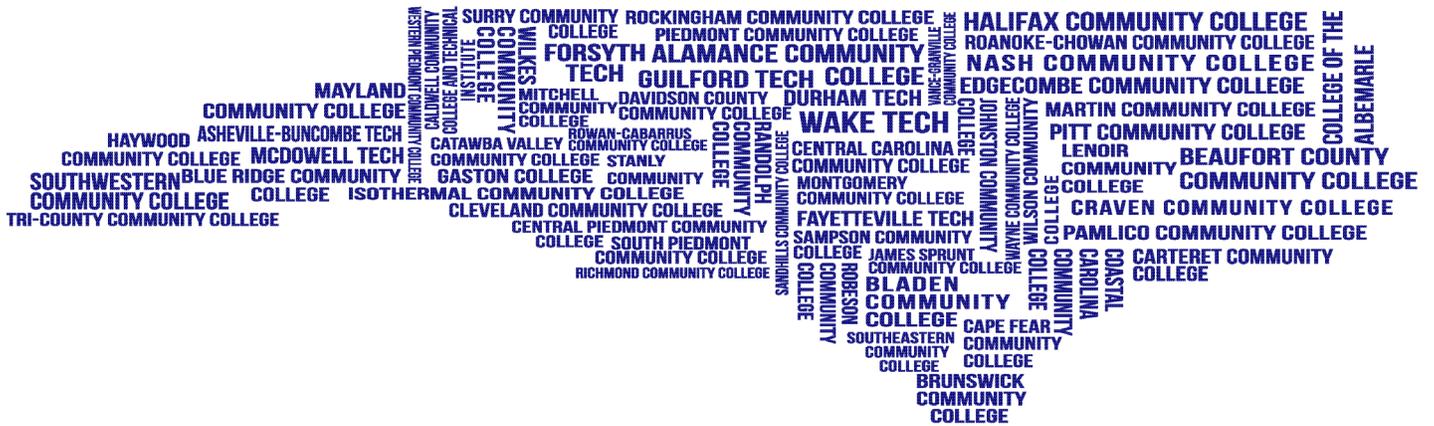
## Design and Editing

- Chreatha Alston, Director of Foundation and Engagement Services
- Brian Long, Executive Director of Public Affairs

For more information about the plan and its implementation, see [ncccommunitycolleges.edu/strategic-plan](http://ncccommunitycolleges.edu/strategic-plan).







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