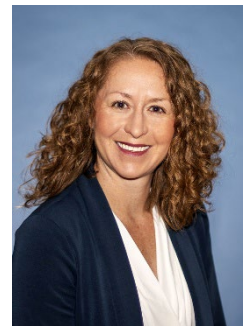


Education & Workforce Conference

AUGUST 4, 2026
RALEIGH, NC

Dr. Lisa Smelser
Executive Director of Workforce Strategic Initiatives
Central Carolina Community College

Dr. Lisa Smelser serves as Executive Director of Workforce Strategic Initiatives at Central Carolina Community College, where she leads cross-divisional strategies that connect curriculum, continuing education, customized training, apprenticeships, work-based learning, and employer partnerships into cohesive education-to-career pathways. She collaborates with more than 30 employers, workforce organizations, and economic development partners while advancing regional and statewide initiatives that strengthen talent pipelines and create greater value for employers, learners, and the communities they serve. Her work focuses on helping employers, educators, and workforce partners build responsive talent systems that create greater opportunity for learners and stronger communities across North Carolina.



A recognized leader in workforce innovation, Dr. Smelser leads Central Carolina Community College's participation in the \$25 million Accelerate NC Life Sciences Manufacturing initiative and serves on the AdvanceNC team, collaborating with 12 community colleges across 21 North Carolina counties to develop employer-informed workforce strategies. She previously led the North Carolina Community College Biotechnology Alignment Project, bringing together 14 colleges to create a unified, employer-informed curriculum, and helped launch the college's first Business & Industry Leadership Team (BILT) model. She is the recipient of the 2025 North Carolina Community College System Excellence in Teaching Award and is a frequent speaker on employer engagement, skills-first practices, and education-to-career systems.

Dr. Smelser earned her Doctor of Education in Science Teaching from Ball State University and holds a master's degree in Biology with a graduate certificate in Biotechnology. She is also a proud 2020 BioWork graduate from Wake Technical Community College, reflecting her belief that lifelong learning strengthens both careers and communities. She lives in Cary, North Carolina, with her husband, Lucas, who recently returned to school to pursue massage therapy, reminding them both that meaningful learning can begin at any stage of life.