



Top Five Takeaways: 2019 Education & Workforce Conference

1. The Business Case for Education

NC's talent supply is not keeping pace with the needs of business.

Dale Jenkins, past chair of the NC Chamber, CEO of Curi and Co-Chair of the myFutureNC Commission, shared some alarming statistics with attendees of the Education & Workforce Conference, presented by Biogen, on Tuesday. Citing a Georgetown Study, Jenkins said that by 2020, 65% of jobs will require a postsecondary degree or training. This is concerning: only 25 out of every 100 9th graders in North Carolina will obtain a postsecondary degree or credential within 6 years of graduating high school. By 2030, our state will need 2 million workers with these credentials, but our current trajectory leaves us 400,000 workers short.

Jenkins urged the audience to boldly embrace and chase the myFutureNC education attainment goal of 2 million postsecondary degrees or credentials by 2030, a goal adopted by Gov. Roy Cooper and our state's education leaders. But educators cannot do it alone. Business leaders are an integral piece to the talent supply solution. They must reach out to their local and state education networks to help inform curricula and introduce students to the needs of 21st century workplaces.

2. The Importance of Pre-K and Third Grade Literacy



NC Chamber Board Member and PNC Regional President Jim Hansen stressed to attendees that a solid and accessible pre-K program lays the foundation for third grade literacy, an education milestone that predicts a student's future success. In fact, a Duke University study found that pre-K participants achieved higher test scores in reading and math, and were less likely to require special education or be held back a grade.

Although half of North Carolina's four-year-olds are eligible for NC Pre-K, 30,000 do not have a slot due largely to a lack of funding, facilities and teachers.

Vance County Superintendent Dr. Anthony Jackson provided an encouraging case study of his district in addressing the urgency of expanded pre-K. The district has gotten creative with its allocation of federal dollars in order to open additional pre-K slots and create summer programs for migrant students. Jackson summed it up well: "It's easier to build strong children than repair broken men."

(Governor Cooper signed a bill this session that will "require a county-by-county survey to assess the obstacles in each county as a guide to modify state funding," writes [Higher Ed Works](#) reporter David Rice.)

3. Demand Planning: The Business Community's Approach to the Leaky Pipeline



Various members of the business community shared their organizations' innovative approaches to the leaky talent pipeline, including Melissa Miranda, vice president of human resources at Electricities of North Carolina, Inc. Key players in the energy industry have formed the [Carolinas Energy Workforce Consortium](#), which brings companies together "to develop solutions to the coming workforce shortage in the utility industry." You can be competitors *and* collaborators, Miranda said.

The NC Chamber is spearheading the [Talent Pipeline Management Academy](#), a U.S. Chamber of Commerce program that is locally implemented and employer-led. The process starts with the TPM Academy, where state and local chambers, business associations, economic development agency leaders, and employers are trained in the framework's six strategies to drive partnerships with education and training providers. Trained facilitators then utilize supply-chain management principles to follow the framework, resulting in a more data- and performance-driven approach to improving these partnerships.

HBCUs are another critical part of the solution. Dr. Paulette Dillard, president of Shaw University, informed the audience that HBCUs award a significant portion of the state's bachelor degrees. The challenge is that the students most likely to report they will not pursue postsecondary are students of color. If we are to truly seal our state's leaky talent pipeline, Dillard said, we must remember that demographics are part of the puzzle.

4. Skills that Pay the Bills

In his energetic keynote, Peyton Holland, executive director of SkillsUSA North Carolina, discussed the bias against "skill" in the United States. Although skill-based jobs such as linework and welding are well-paid and aplenty, our culture still promotes the four year degree as a golden ticket to success. However, 41% of college graduates go into a field that does not require a degree in the area they studied, Holland said, rendering students "underemployed."



Holland noted that a four-year degree is still incredibly valuable for many individuals, but a culture shift is needed at the home and school level to encourage students to pursue “skill/credential over degree” when appropriate.

5. North Carolina’s top education leaders take questions



In the final session of the day, audience members posed questions to NC Community Colleges President Peter Hans; State Superintendent Mark Johnson; NC Independent Colleges and Universities President Hope Williams and NCSU Vice Chancellor Kevin Howell. All panelists agreed that collaboration between the business and education communities is essential in achieving the goal of 2 million postsecondary degrees or credentials by 2030. As Peter Hans said in an earlier session, it should be our goal to make North Carolina “The State of Minds.”

**Throughout the day, audience members also attended breakout sessions that provided regional case studies of business/education collaboration. For more detail on those sessions, view the [event agenda](#).*

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NC Chamber
701 Corporate Center Drive, Suite 400
Raleigh, NC 27607

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