



Governor's Council on Workforce & Apprenticeships
Meeting 3 | May 22, 2025
MINUTES

Council Members Present: Gov. Josh Stein, Chair Sen. Eddie Settle, Sec. Lee Lilley, Andréa Allard, Rep. Vernetta Alston, Sen. Val Applewhite, Mark Bolton, Chad Bouffiu, J.B. Buxton, Deon Carter (Sherry Carpenter), John Loyack (Dr. Jeff Cox), Mark Bolton, Jennifer Dewitt (Jennifer Allen), Brian Floyd, Steven Mange, Edsel McDonald, Deanne Meadows (Cecilia Holden), Trey Michael, Anna Perkinson, Dr. Travis Reeves, Eric Shoults, Tammy Simmons, Sarah Kaminer Bourland (Karen Wade), Dr. Thomas Walker, Wendy Walker-Fox, Tom West, and Rep. Matthew Winslow

Subject Matter & Resources Experts: Meihui Bodane, Dr. Andrea DeSantis, Kindl Detar, Dr. Annie Izod, Dr. Oleksandr Movchan, Caroline Sullivan, Jamie Vaughn, and Misty Wolfe

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chair Senator Settle opened the meeting by acknowledging the importance of the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships (the Council) in shaping North Carolina's economic future. He thanked Council members, stakeholders, and state leaders for their engagement during the last two meetings, acknowledging their dedication and the Council's composition of business leaders, government officials, education and workforce development experts, and community stakeholders.

Sen. Settle followed up with the roll call and the approval of the minutes. Pres. J.B. Buxton made the motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Mark Bolton. The motion was carried.

Next was the reading of the Conflict of Interest and announcement of Ethics Awareness Training. The training is required for all Council members that are not state government employees. The next available training will be held on June 18, 2025.

Introduction of Governor Josh Stein

Next, Sen. Settle introduced Governor Josh Stein, praising his leadership and vision in workforce development. He emphasized the Governor's support in making the Council a collaborative, strategic initiative to meet the needs of workers, students, and businesses.

Governor Stein's Opening Remarks

Gov. Stein expressed gratitude to the Council members for their service, time and dedication, and thanked Sen. Settle, Sec. Lilley, and Pres. Cox for their leadership and expertise. He commented that *"we share the goals of making North Carolina the best state in the nation for business and the best state for workers"* and emphasized that both goals depend on working together to develop a strong workforce.

- He noted that NC's workforce is the key to fueling our state's economic growth, ensuring employers have the talent they need, and expanding pathways to careers for North Carolinians and highlighted

that there are various ingredients at play, including apprenticeships, labor market alignment, and credential and degree attainment. Governor Stein emphasized that these are all tools for achieving our true goals: opportunities for North Carolinians to support their families and a workforce that enables business to grow and succeed.

- Gov. Stein reaffirmed his administration's commitment to making workforce development a priority, stating, *"As long as I'm Governor, no state will outwork North Carolina when it comes to developing our workforce."*
- He outlined recent economic development and workforce initiatives, including participating alongside Sec. Lilley in the SelectUSA conference in Washington, D.C., to showcase North Carolina's workforce efforts; the announcement of over 700 good-paying jobs coming to North Carolina due to two major investments; and his budget proposal directing over \$250 million toward workforce development efforts. Gov. Stein committed to advocating for these goals as the state budget moves into negotiation phases with the General Assembly.
- He highlighted his advocacy for expanding apprenticeship programs in state government to recruit and retain talent to fill vacancies, helping small businesses and farmers recruit and retain talent via apprenticeships, establishing a rural apprenticeship program, investing in Propel NC, making community college free for students pursuing workforce credentials in high demand fields, funding and support our health care workforce, including strengthening the pipeline, and increasing the number of incarcerated people with a degree.
- The Governor also noted that his most recent Helene budget request included \$15 million in training people to meet the construction, health care, and logistics needs in western NC.
- Gov. Stein praised the Council's ongoing strategic efforts and expressed his eagerness to review the goals by June 15 and the strategies by December 15.
- He extended appreciation to the Dept. of Commerce; NC Business Committee for Education; Dr. Annie Izod, Dr. Andrea DeSantis, and Caroline Sullivan; and recognized the NCWorks Commission, which oversees the Council, for its critical role in advancing the state's workforce agenda. He concluded by thanking Council members for their time and continued engagement.

Sen. Settle thanked the Governor and reaffirmed the Council's commitment to advancing workforce initiatives that align with state priorities.

Overview of Council's Work

Sen. Settle expressed appreciation for the strong engagement and attendance from members of the Council. He reminded attendees that the council was created by Executive Order No. 11 on March 25, 2025. The primary mission is to holistically strengthen and grow North Carolina's workforce development efforts over the next four years. He continued to outline some key points to remember:

- The first major deadline is June 15th, by which the council must identify strategic, quantifiable goals that are meaningful and support the overall mission.
- A second deadline is December 15th, when members must present defined strategies and milestones to achieve these established goals.

- A final reporting deadline in December 2026 will involve delivering a comprehensive progress report to the governor outlining achievements and challenges related to those goals and strategies.
- Sen. Settle emphasized that the strategic goals must be meaningful, moveable, and measurable. With the Governor actively involved and committed to reviewing progress, we want to ensure a high-quality and accurate report.
- He cited insights from the April 9th meeting, where the council heard from experts at the Dept. of Commerce. The takeaways were: there's growth in healthcare and government sectors; low unemployment rates in North Carolina; and a current trend of strong job creation, though hiring has slowed recently due to economic uncertainties. The council had worked diligently to narrow its focus to 6-12 strategic goals that are "*measurable, movable, and meaningful*." They are based on existing data and feedback and have been vetted through a process to ensure consensus and alignment. Additional goals were proposed in areas lacking clear direction, ensuring a well-rounded and data-supported approach.
- At the most recent meeting on April 28th, Sen. Settle stated that the council heard a presentation from the NC Office of Management and Budget State Demographer and the Employer Survey from NC Commerce regarding critical population and labor force trends. Key observations included:
 - North Carolina's aging workforce shows projections for a significant portion of the labor force will be over 65 by 2030.
 - Rural population decline, with out-migration on youth and growing diversity trends in schools.
 - A notable trend showing no single racial or ethnic majority in K-12 schools, indicating shifting demographics that will influence future workforce needs.

Discussion from the Council, in particular feedback from employer representatives, revealed the need for expanded talent pipelines, including both college-bound and non-college pathways; persistent challenges with attendance, punctuality childcare, and transportation that significantly impact our workforce. Sen. Settle added that the revised goals were reviewed, including newly drafted ones, spoke on the guidance from Gov. Stein. Sen. Settle shared what President Cox had reminded the council on the guidance from the governor about the opportunity to have an impact on workforce development efforts. Credentials, degrees, and apprenticeships are means to a greater goal—helping all North Carolinians build meaningful careers and supporting business growth. Members should see their best ideas and biggest concerns addressed or reflected in output.

Presentations and Meeting Agenda

Sen. Settle outlined the meeting agenda to include a presentation from NC Department of Public Instruction; review of draft goals, reflect survey feedback; vote on goals; and review of next steps.

Career and Technical Education Data

Trey Michael, Senior Director of Career and Technical Education (CTE), NC Dept. of Public Information (DPI), presented an overview of the Career Development Plan (CDP) for students. The presentation also included Missy Wolfe, NC DPI, and Jamie Vaughn NC Dept. of Commerce, who joined to share further insights.

- The plan is designed to help K-12 students begin developing career plans early to help students envision and prepare for career opportunities beyond public school. Trey Michael emphasized the importance of preparing students to become successful employees by providing tools and resources

to explore career paths, align academic goals, and build career portfolios.

- A new [CDP resource webpage](#) was introduced, offering printable guidance for parents, students, educators, and local boards, along with planning tools, FAQs, and legislation links. Monthly collaboration sessions for local leaders supported implementation, with the final session of the year scheduled for June 13. While there is currently no mandatory reporting requirement, pending legislation may introduce reporting as part of a pilot program.
- Trey Michael also highlighted integration efforts with Infinite Campus and the growing use of NC Careers, which has expanded its market share in CDP implementation from 45% to over 60% in the past year. These developments aim to enhance students' ability to plan effectively and connect with North Carolina's workforce opportunities.

Jamie Vaughn provided a high-level overview of the [NCcareers.org](#) platform, a free statewide career information system developed in partnership with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and 11 other organizations.

- The platform is designed to support career development planning and bridge information gaps between job seekers, educators, and employers. Jamie Vaughn emphasized that NCcareers serves as both an educational resource and a strategic policy tool, offering consistent, equitable, and data-driven information to all North Carolinians, regardless of geography or background.
- NCcareers.org aims to share objective labor market information and support informed career decision-making for students and adults. Jamie Vaughn noted that while platforms like MajorClarity were previously used, NCcareers has now gained significant traction, currently being used by 60% of North Carolina school districts.
- In the past 12 months, 600,000 users accessed the platform, up from just over 500,000 in 2024, including 18% of users aged 18 and older, illustrating its utility beyond middle and high school students.
- Additionally, the platform supports over 200,000 registered accounts and emphasizes top 10 occupations viewed and saved as four- and five-Star Jobs, which represent the most promising employment opportunities.
- Key advantages of NCcareers CDP include its no-cost access, portability of student accounts across districts and beyond high school, and the state's ownership and ability to adapt content based on evolving workforce needs. More importantly, portability ensures students can continue building their career development plans even if they relocate or change schools. Jamie Vaughn stressed that NCcareers is not just an individual planning tool but a statewide resource for shaping workforce policy.
- A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DPI enables more robust student-level data collection and regional analysis. This allows the platform to track where students are completing career development plans, their occupational interests, higher education intentions, and geographic trends. With this data, state leaders and the Workforce Council can analyze alignment between student goals, educational offerings, and regional labor market demands, thereby strengthening pipelines and informing future workforce and education policy decisions. Vaughn concluded by

encouraging council members to view NCCareers as a strategic data tool that empowers both students and policymakers.

Misty Wolfe shared an in-depth update on North Carolina's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, highlighting its broad reach and critical role in preparing students for postsecondary success.

- In the 2023–2024 school year, over 972,000 CTE course enrollments were recorded for grades 6–12, including dual enrollment opportunities through Career & College Promise. While this figure is duplicated (students may be enrolled in multiple courses), approximately 550,000 unique students participated, representing about 70% of all public-school students in those grade levels that we're reaching in CTE.
- Misty Wolfe explained key CTE terminology: a participant is any student completing at least one CTE course, while a concentrator completes two or more courses in a specific pathway. Both categories have grown steadily over the past three years.
- She presented data on the top ten CTE pathways by student engagement, noting that Health Science – Healthcare Professional had the most concentrators in 2023–2024, with at least 22,000 students enrolled in entry-level health science courses.
- Additional attention was given to high-interest clusters such as architecture and construction, where pathways like carpentry may report lower concentrator numbers (e.g., 1,700) but have significantly higher introductory-level student engagement, often ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 students—demonstrating strong exploration interest and future potential. Misty Wolfe cautioned that pathway data may be misinterpreted if not considered in the broader context of progression and engagement.
- Finally, Misty Wolfe presented data on formative CTE experiences among the 2024 graduation cohort. Of the over 106,000 seniors, approximately 62% participated in a CTE-related experience during their senior year alone, including CTE courses, dual enrollment, CTE-aligned AP/IB coursework, and work-based learning. This figure reflects only senior-year engagement and does not account for students' CTE involvement in earlier grades, underscoring the substantial and growing footprint of CTE in preparing students across North Carolina.

In closing, Trey Michael emphasized the importance of career development plans as a vital opportunity for students to explore, plan and prepare for meaningful careers. He noted that tools like NCCareers support both students and schools in this planning process. However, to align education with evolving workforce demands, local district leaders must also focus on reskilling, upskilling, and in some cases, shifting CTE personnel to meet regional labor needs. Progress has been made in urgent fields such as construction, healthcare, computer science and IT, but continued work is needed. CDPs not only help students plan but also increase awareness of emerging career opportunities in North Carolina.

Goal Review & Discussion – Survey Part 2

Sec. Lilley thanked Trey Michael, Jamie Vaughn and Misty Wolfe for their presentation, which he described as a helpful and informative overview of the impactful work occurring across different aspects of career and technical education and workforce development in North Carolina.

He then transitioned to the main segment of the meeting, which would focus on reviewing the Council's proposed strategic goals, the baseline data needed to support and measure those goals, the responsible parties for each goal, and the feedback received from member surveys. He thanked members for taking the

time to complete the surveys.

Sec. Lilley reiterated a key responsibility of the council, originally outlined by Sen. Settle: to recommend strategic, quantifiable goals that will meaningfully and holistically improve workforce preparation and growth across the state. He emphasized that these goals must be time-bound, with a four-year timeline, and include annual progress reports to be submitted each December.

He noted that while some goals may ultimately extend beyond the four-year scope, the Council's charge is to define a clear, actionable foundation within that timeframe. He also stressed the importance of baseline data—which Meihui Bodane, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Research, and Strategy, would help to present so that the council can accurately measure progress and set realistic targets.

He made it clear that the June 15 submission is considered the “first round” and forms the basis of the council's work. However, he encouraged flexibility, stating that if the council identifies a missing or misaligned goal later, it should be revised or added to ensure a high-quality final report. The governor, he noted, is most interested in receiving a thoughtful and impactful plan. *“The aim is to deliver a plan that holds up and drives results.”*

Finally, Sec. Lilley reminded members that a vote on the proposed goals would take place at the end of the meeting and encouraged everyone to be prepared for that action. He then proceeded to facilitate the discussion around the proposed goals:

Proposed Goal: High School Student Preparedness & Success

Goal 1: *By graduation, every high school student will have engaged in a formative experience in preparation for the postsecondary pathway of their choice (to include dual enrollment, CTE, JROTC, AP/IB, work-based learning, etc.).*

Baseline Data: For CTE students, 62% participated in CTE, dual enrollment, AP/IB, and/or WBL course. DPI is working to pull this data for all high school students.

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Public Instruction

- The council discussed whether the wording “formative experience” should be replaced to enhance clarity, and Sec. Lilley recommended removing the word “formative” in response to survey feedback.
- Andréa Allard suggested including direct military enlistment as a postsecondary option in addition to JROTC, sharing her own family experience. Sec. Lilley clarified that the goal targets experiences during high school, not after graduation, and JROTC was intended to cover military-oriented preparation.
- Sen. Settle raised equity concerns about rural access to JROTC, noting that his district (Wilkes County), only one of four high schools offers it. He questioned the feasibility of including JROTC as a benchmark when it's not universally available.
- Dr. Travis Reeves affirmed that JROTC programs are not universally available due to competitive and costly federal approval processes. He acknowledged that while his district has JROTC in all three high schools, this is rare. He also pointed out that the same access challenges apply to AP and IB courses,

especially in rural areas. Reeves emphasized the need for the goal to be inclusive of a range of valid preparatory experiences — including the arts — and noted his daughter’s success through NC State’s College of Design as an example.

- Further discussion focused on clarifying whether the goal targets all students or just CTE students. Trey Michael explained that broader data collection is underway to include non-CTE pathways such as AP, IB, and dual enrollment. Sec. Lilley asked whether DPI could help build comprehensive baseline data in the next four years and whether it’s realistic to set a goal of 100% student participation in a postsecondary preparatory experience, and Trey Michael agreed it is ambitious but feasible.
- The group also addressed phrasing suggestions. Steven Mange proposed changing “to include” to “such as” to better reflect the goal’s flexibility, which Sec. Lilley endorsed and asked staff to note the change.
- There was consensus that DPI will need to assist in refining and expanding data collection, while other agencies support students in accessing these experiences.
- Dr. Reeves expressed concern over how to measure progress toward the goal and suggested separating it into two distinct objectives: one broadly encompassing all pathways and another more tightly focused on CTE and work-based learning, which all public schools can offer. He stressed the importance of connecting students to real postsecondary outcomes and proposed aligning these goals with accountability measures for meaningful system change. Sec. Lilley agreed with the idea of developing both a comprehensive and a more targeted version of the goal to ensure clarity and feasibility.
- Sec. Lilley explained this goal was derived from the council survey responses and aligned with the legislative mandate to adopt four-year quantifiable goals with annual progress reporting.

Proposed Goal: High School Student Preparedness & Success

Goal 2: For graduating high school students, increase postsecondary enrollment, moving into employment with living wage, or enlistment in the military within 12 months of high school graduation.

Baseline Data: 92% of the graduating class of ‘23 was either enrolled or employed within 12 months of high school graduation.

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Public Instruction

- The discussion transitioned to the second proposed goal: improving high school student preparedness. The proposed goal is to increase the percentage of high school graduates who, within 12 months of graduation, are either enrolled in postsecondary education, employed, or enlisted in the military. Initially, the goal included a “living wage” component, but that was removed due to the difficulty of defining and measuring a consistent living wage across the state’s diverse geographic and economic regions.
- Meihui Bodane shared baseline data for the Class of 2023, indicating that 82% of graduates were either enrolled or employed within 12 months. Of those, approximately 20–21% enrolled in a UNC System university and 27% in a North Carolina community college. Employment figures, which

include paid internships and work-based learning—reached about 66%, though there is considerable overlap with students who are both working and enrolled. Around 7% of graduates were not captured in the state’s data systems, likely due to attending out-of-state or private institutions, or enlisting in the military.

- The discussion revealed that private college enrollment and military enlistment data are not fully captured in existing employment systems because military service is not included in standard unemployment insurance (UI) data. Preliminary figures indicate about 1,000 students from the Class of 2023 enlisted, but this does not include JROTC participants. Efforts are currently underway to improve the collection of these figures.
- Dr. DeSantis suggested that the current 82% outcome baseline could be more ambitious than simply increasing to 83%, and Brian Floyd proposed benchmarking against other states or peer regions to better contextualize North Carolina’s performance. Tom West contributed data on independent college enrollment, which could help round out the state’s postsecondary figures.
- Concerns were raised about whether the state should be promoting military enlistment as a goal. Senator Applewhite expressed concern that some minority and rural students are disproportionately encouraged to enlist in military roles that do not lead to transferable civilian skills, citing high unemployment rates among veterans. Edsel McDonald supported this concern, sharing that his own military occupation specialty (12B, Combat Engineer) left him unprepared for civilian employment. Ultimately, there was consensus to remove the living wage language, explore better data inclusion for private colleges and the military, and reassess the goal’s numeric target using peer comparisons. Staff will revise the goal language and present an updated draft at the next meeting.

Proposed Goal: Employer Engagement

Goal 3: Engage 50,000 employers to commit to participating in sector-based strategies, work-based learning, and career exploration opportunities for learners and jobseekers.

Baseline Data: As of the fourth quarter, 2024, North Carolina is home to 376,965 business establishments. In 2024, ApprenticeshipNC served ~4k employers and NCWorks served over 26k employers. While not all for WBL and sector partnerships, it’s a strong source of potential employers.

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Commerce

- The Council then moved to Goal 3: Employer Engagement. The goal is to recruit 50,000 North Carolina employers over four years to participate in sector-based workforce strategies, work-based learning opportunities, and career exploration activities. Dr. DeSantis clarified that while NCWorks currently works with about 26,000 employers and ApprenticeshipNC with 4,000, only a subset are engaged in the targeted ways this goal envisions. Thus, the 50,000 target represents newly qualified engagements, not just cumulative totals. Sec. Lilley emphasized that while the number is ambitious, existing partnerships provide a solid foundation to build on.
- Meihui Bodane reported that North Carolina has approximately 377,000 registered business establishments. A 10% participation goal would equal about 37,000 businesses, and 15% would be over 56,000, making the 50,000 target reasonable though aggressive.

- Deon Carter proposed a focused campaign to engage NCWorks partners specifically in sector strategies.

It was stressed that there's a need for strong training support to prepare both school systems and businesses for deeper collaboration and that developing these supports would be a cross-agency effort involving Commerce, DPI, community colleges, NCWorks, and ApprenticeshipNC. Also, noted, that national organizations could help train and facilitate partnerships between schools and employers.

Proposed Goal: Labor Market Alignment

Goal 4: Build a locally driven, unified approach between workforce and education partners that allow them to adapt to the real-time and long-term needs of employers.

Baseline Data: Not available

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Commerce, NCCCS, NC Department of Public Instruction, UNC System, and NCICUs

- The council reviewed the fourth proposed goal: labor market alignment. Sec. Lilley introduced the draft goal, which seeks to build a locally driven, unified approach between workforce and education partners that enables them to adapt to both real-time and long-term employer needs. Although this goal received positive survey feedback, there was consensus that it needed refining to better capture how regional collaboration and data use could align training programs with local labor demands.
- The updated goal language proposed emphasizing coordinated partnerships between workforce and education agencies in every region of the state, using shared labor market data to align local training programs with current and projected employer needs. Brian Floyd and Sen. Settle supported this framing, and Dr. DeSantis explained that success could be measured by both the quantity and quality of these partnerships. She noted that local school districts, community colleges, universities, and workforce development boards should all be engaged and held accountable through standardized metrics.
- Andréa Allard asked whether the goal should also include direct pipelines between employers and schools, offering an example from Greenville where a business partnered with Greenville Tech to create a training-to-employment pathway in aircraft maintenance. Dr. DeSantis confirmed this kind of alignment is exactly what the goal is intended to promote and emphasized that many strong examples already exist in North Carolina. Brian Floyd noted that while he supports the direction, the goal should more clearly specify outcomes—such as workforce gap assessments or program expansions—so there is a clear purpose and timeline for these partnerships.
- Steven Mange recommended modifying the language to acknowledge existing partnerships by using terms like “establish or expand,” and adjusting phrasing to ensure shared labor market data is clearly tied to partnership activities, not just regional coverage.
- Pres. J.B. Buxton added that this goal feels more like a strategy that supports larger, overarching goals such as credential attainment or sector-based training. He suggested organizing goals into broader categories with specific strategies beneath them to clarify intent and alignment.

- Sec. Lilley concluded that while baseline data is not currently available, the state can track growth over time as more partnerships are formed, and quality standards are developed. He proposed using the original language for now but incorporating new suggestions, like Steven's and J.B.'s, into a revised version for further review. A follow-up survey will allow Council members to provide input on the revised language and measurement strategies.

Labor Force Participation & Wages

The Council then transitioned to the next topic—labor force participation and wages—but acknowledged that more time and feedback are needed before this goal can be finalized. That discussion will continue beyond the June 15 timeline, with further analysis planned for the December report.

Goal Review – Survey Part 1 (Previously Discussed Goals)

Following the transition to the next slide, the Council reviewed and confirmed alignment on previously discussed strategic goals while noting additional feedback for refinement. Sec. Lilley opened the discussion by revisiting the state's overarching postsecondary attainment goal in alignment with myFutureNC.

Credential Attainment

Goal 5: 2 million North Carolinians aged 25-44 will have earned an industry-valued credential or degree.

Baseline Data: As of 2023, North Carolina had an estimated 1,664,892 adults ages 25-44 with a high-quality degree or credential; this is 13,000 individuals below where the state needed to be, at this time, to be on target for the 2 million by 2030 goal.

Responsible Partner(s): myFutureNC staff and myFutureNC Board of Directors

- This goal is grounded in legislation passed in 2019 and serves as a foundational metric for gauging progress toward building a competitive workforce in North Carolina. Sec. Lilley emphasized that as of 2022, roughly 1.55 million individuals in this age group had earned such a credential or degree, meaning an additional 450,000 individuals need to attain a credential within the next five years to meet the target.
- There is strong support for maintaining the goal, noting its bipartisan backing and alignment across K-12, community colleges, and workforce systems.
- Dr. Reeves raised a question in the chat about the age range and whether it accounts for reentering citizens or younger individuals transitioning from high school into the workforce. Deanne Meadows clarified that while opportunity youth aged 16–24 is a critical focus for intervention strategies, the 25–44 range provides a consistent benchmark tied to national and state-level longitudinal data, enabling measurable progress toward credential attainment goals.
- It was asked if the goal includes returning citizens from incarceration. Sec. Lilley responded yes, the goal includes all pathways, regardless of age or background.

- The group agreed to maintain the 25–44 range in the formal goal but acknowledged the need to support a broader population through complementary strategies.

Apprenticeships & Worked-Based Learning

Goal 6: Double the number of registered apprentices and increase the number of experiential work-based learning opportunities

Apprentices Baseline Data:

- 9,698 registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.
- Registered apprenticeship counts include both apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships registered through ApprenticeshipNC.

Work-Based Learning Baseline Data:

- 56,846 experiences across DPI, NCCCS, Commerce, DOA, DAC, and DHHS
- Broadly defined WBL as multi-week opportunities that provide hands-on work experiences to learners and jobseekers, including a course, internships, on-the-job training, incumbent worker training.

Does not include lab course data at NCCCS

- Dr. DeSantis shared data on broader work-based learning experiences, including 56,000 reported “experiences” across multiple agencies and educational systems. However, these were aggregated and not de-duplicated, raising challenges in accurately tracking outcomes or identifying overlap. These experiences included community college work-based learning courses, K–12 internships, job shadowing, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, vocational rehabilitation placements, and correctional industries programs.
- Several Council members emphasized the importance of clarity and rigor in goal setting. J.B. Buxton advocated for separating apprenticeships from general work-based learning goals, explaining in the chat: “Registered apprenticeships are tied to credential pathways and labor outcomes. The definition and quality assurance are clearer than for internships or job shadows.”
- Mark Bolton agreed to keep the apprenticeship goal focused and make experiential learning a separate goal.
- From a workforce development view, Wendy Walker-Fox shared that they see work-based learning as a program, not just an educational experience. Apprenticeship is one type; others are valid too.
- Caroline Sullivan agreed that while other work-based learning experiences are valuable, they vary significantly in quality, duration, and employment outcomes and are not comparable to the structure or outcomes of apprenticeships. High-quality internships and pre-apprenticeship programs could still be captured through strategy and measurement but should not dilute the apprenticeship-specific goal.
- Sarah Bourland (DHHS) commented that their VR programs use terms like “supported employment.” That might work as a broader umbrella.

- Trey Michael commented that internships tied to coursework and involving 100-120 hours can be significant. They're different from short-term job shadows and deserve recognition as distinct experiences.
- The council reached strong consensus to decouple these two objectives, maintaining a clear, measurable goal of doubling registered apprentices while creating a separate goal or strategy to enhance the number and quality of other work-based learning opportunities.

Sector Strategies

Goal 7: Create statewide sector-based strategies for at least 3 key industries including, but not limited to education, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing to increase the pool of well-trained workers for these fields.

Baseline Data: As of 2024, North Carolina lacks fully developed, state-wide sector strategies across the targeted industries. While some regional and sectoral efforts exist, they are not coordinated at a statewide level. 15 current regional sector partnerships exist in industries including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, maritime, etc., as well as certified career pathways in 19 local areas in healthcare/life science and 18 local areas in advanced manufacturing.

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Commerce

- The council then turned its attention to sector-based strategies for workforce development. Sec. Lilley reiterated the recommendation to focus on three critical and high-growth sectors: health care, education, and advanced manufacturing. These sectors represent not only current workforce shortages but also long-term economic opportunity and alignment with state economic development priorities.
- All three sectors have seen strategic investment from the legislature and the community college system in recent years, particularly in the form of community college programs and public-private partnerships. It was noted that filling in vacancies in education—especially for teachers and support personnel—is essential for sustaining the state's talent pipeline.
- In the chat, Anna Perkinson asked: *Is there a framework for measuring which industry sectors have the highest job growth and credentialing opportunity over time?* She emphasized the importance of manufacturing apprenticeships and industry partnerships in addressing the advanced manufacturing skills gap. It was confirmed that tools such as NC TOWER and labor market dashboards would be used to monitor alignment.
- While there was acknowledgment that other sectors—such as construction, information technology, logistics, and life sciences—also merit support, council members agreed that narrowing the focus would enable more effective coordination and measurement.
- The selected sectors will serve as pilot areas for expanded work-based learning, employer engagement, and credentialing pathways.

State Government Vacancy Rate

Goal 8: Reduce state government vacancy rate to 15% through innovative recruitment and retention practices including, but not limited to, trainee opportunities and apprenticeship programs.

Baseline Data: As of February 2025, the vacancy rate for the State of North Carolina was 20.1%. The state defines vacancy rate as the number of positions vacant in relation to the total number of positions.

Responsible Partner(s): Office of State Human Resources

- The conversation then shifted to a proposed goal to address North Carolina’s significant state government workforce vacancies. Anna Perkinson presented data showing that as of April 2024, the statewide vacancy rate for state government positions exceeded 21%, with critical shortages in areas like health and human services, transportation, and corrections – all impacting service delivery and agency performance.
- The proposed goal is to reduce that vacancy rate to 15% by 2030. Strategies to achieve this include modernizing the hiring process, expanding internship and apprenticeship pipelines into state jobs, improving pay and benefits, and implementing targeted upskilling programs for current employees.
- In the chat, a council member asked: “Would agency-led apprenticeship or work-based learning programs be counted toward the apprenticeship goal?” The consensus was to treat them as strategies contributing to state hiring goals rather than merging them with the broader apprenticeship objective, maintaining the clarity of both goals.
- Anna Perkinson highlighted new work-based learning opportunities offered by agencies like the Dept. of Health and Human Services and the Dept. of Transportation that could serve as onramps for talent entering public service.

AI Readiness

Goal 9: Develop a plan to integrate AI skills development into sector-based strategies and work-based learning in key industries to build a future-ready workforce.

Baseline Data: Not available

Responsible Partner(s): NC Business Committee for Education

- The council explored the potential inclusion of a new strategic goal related to artificial intelligence (AI) workforce readiness. There’s not a lot of baseline data because this is relatively new. The North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) is to take the lead on the AI skills development component.
- Caroline Sullivan reported on growing activity in this area, particularly within K–12 and postsecondary education systems. NCBCE, housed in the Governor’s Office, is making efforts to pilot AI professional development for educators and to identify baseline data on AI-related courses, certifications, and industry needs. There are a couple of grants to support these efforts. She added that the first thing

they really need is to collect all the activity happening in this space and invited anyone on the council to help.

- While the field is still emerging and data infrastructure is limited, the council agreed that establishing North Carolina as a national leader in responsible AI adoption and workforce preparation is a strategic imperative.
- A member asked in the chat: *“What baseline data exists on AI skills or courses currently offered?”* Staff responded that data is still being compiled, but preliminary mapping is underway with both K-12 and post-secondary institutions.
- The Council supported continued exploration and cross-agency coordination, with the possibility of formalizing an AI-related strategic goal in the future once baseline data and priority skill areas are defined.

Outreach

Goal 10: *Launch statewide public outreach effort to share workforce development resources broadly, including with students, families, and employers, to maximize engagement.*

Baseline Data: Not available

Responsible Partner(s): NC Department of Commerce

- “Goal 10” goals represent a comprehensive strategy to align education, training, and employment efforts with the state’s evolving labor market needs.
- The slide detailed a statewide public outreach campaign aimed at distributing workforce development resources to key audiences including students, families, and employers. The goal of this initiative is to boost awareness and engagement across North Carolina’s communities.
- Sec. Lilley noted that while no baseline engagement data is currently available, there is intent to develop metrics over time to quantify the effectiveness and reach of this outreach.
- The initiative met with strong support, reflecting a shared understanding of the importance of communication and visibility in driving workforce alignment.

Closing Remarks

Sec. Lilley introduced a slide that outlined the 10 strategic workforce development goals under discussion by the council and shifted to a summary of the council’s goal-setting process. Originally considering 13 strategic goals, the council had refined the list down to 10 through collaborative discussions. Following additional input during this meeting and a forthcoming survey—details of which will be sent via email—further refinement is expected ahead of the June 12th session. He praised the council members for their participation, expressing confidence in the progress made.

Following the extensive discussion on the goals, Sen. Settle and Sec. Lilley agreed to postpone the vote to accept all goals to allow staff time to incorporate feedback, refine metrics, and finalize language. The goals will be distributed to council members ahead of the next meeting on June 12, 2025. The meeting closed with affirmation that this collaborative feedback is essential to shaping actionable and measurable goals for the state's workforce strategy.

Following Sec. Lilley's remarks, Steven Mange raised a question about how second-chance employment opportunities for justice-involved individuals would fit into the council's strategic framework. He asked whether this topic aligned with a specific goal or crossed over into multiple categories. Sec. Lilley responded that the issue would likely intersect with several goals, especially those focusing on workforce strategies beyond the high school level. Dr. Annie Izod added that this topic would be incorporated into strategic planning focused on targeted populations. She emphasized the council's responsibility to ensure that these populations are considered during the development of inclusive strategies, and she expressed appreciation for the collaborative input received throughout the meeting.

Sen. Settle then resumed the floor with closing comments. He thanked the council members for their time and engagement, highlighted the importance of reviewing the draft report that would be distributed, and reiterated the date and location of the next in-person meeting: **Thursday, June 12, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Dept. of Public Instruction building in Raleigh**. Sen. Settle concluded by thanking the members again and wished everyone a restful break before reconvening in June.

Sen. Settle reminded members to reach out to staff with any follow-up questions in the interim. The meeting was formally adjourned.