



Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships

Wednesday, April 9, 2025
Albemarle Building Room 240
2:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M. | Raleigh, N.C.

Minutes

Present:

Co-Chair Jeffrey Cox, Co-Chair Lee Lilley, Co-Chair Senator Settle

Jennifer Allen, Representative Vernetta Alston, Senator Val Applewhite, Mark Bolton, Chad Bouffiou, JB Buxton, Sherry Carpenter, Brian Floyd, Cecilia Holden, Michelle Kenney (Representative Matthew Winslow), Steve Mange, Edsel McDonald, Trey Michael, Anna Perkinson, Dr. Travis Reeves, Eric Shoults, Tammy Simmons, Karen Wade, Dr. Thomas Walker, Wendy Walker-Fox, Tom West, Jessica Whichard (Andréa Allard).

Absent:

Senator Val Applewhite

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Senator Settle provided opening remarks highlighting the importance of this work and the collaboration amongst those in the room. He then invited the co-chairs and Council members to provide brief introductions and mentioned that Council members have a membership list in their packets. Senator Settle then read the required Ethics statement. He said that the Governor's Office will be hosting Ethics training sessions soon and more information will be shared. Senator Settle then read the Conflict-of-Interest statement.

Next, President Cox reviewed the Council responsibilities for Phase I of the work (April – June 2025). He highlighted the main topic areas of focus for today's meeting:

1. Credential and degree attainment
2. Labor market alignment
3. Pre-and registered apprenticeships
4. Sector-based strategies in emerging areas.
5. State government employment.
6. Work-based learning opportunities.

He then reviewed the timeline for the Council's work and acknowledged the tight timeline. He noted that there will be four meetings between the first meeting and the June 15th deadline. President Cox then briefly reviewed the responsibilities and timeline for Phase II of the work; with a focus on strategy development between August and December 2025. He then briefly reviewed the responsibilities for Phase II acknowledging that this will come in August 2025.

President Cox further discussed the charge for the Council and highlighted that the Council should focus on setting 6 – 12 goals that are meaningful, moveable, and measurable—similar in structure the state's educational attainment goal. He mentioned that these goals will not be exhaustive of all the good work but will focus on our "best bets" as a state and our greatest needs. He acknowledged the plan for this first meeting is to review existing goals and begin brainstorming additional goals.

Secretary Lilley acknowledged his appreciation of the Council members for their commitment to serve. He then directed the members to a draft document on NC's Workforce System Key Stakeholders. This document outlines the partners in workforce development and their core missions. Secretary Lilley noted that North Carolina's workforce development system is highly integrated and complex, involving state entities including the NC Business Committee on Education (NCBCE), Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, Public Instruction, Administration and Adult Correction, along with our partner in educational attainment myFutureNC, and our local area workforce development boards, among others. He pointed out that employers are a central part of our system as users of talent and our partners in developing it. We are here to encourage better alignment among our partners and to be unified in achieving our workforce development goals.

He shared how this work will be supported by several key staff members and invited staff including Kindl Shinn Detar, Andrea DeSantis, Annie Izod, John Loyack, and Caroline Sullivan, and Meihui Bodane to introduce themselves. Secretary Lilley then invited Jonathan Guarine, an economist with the North Carolina Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) to provide a labor market update.

Labor Market Update and Economic Context

Jonathan Guarine provided a labor market update, highlighting North Carolina's 3.7% unemployment rate, 82.7% prime-age labor force participation, and 412,000 jobs added since January 2020. North Carolina's prime age labor force participation rate is higher than it was in 2019, but overall participation has declined. The state's unemployment rate is at 3.7%, below the national average, and job growth has been strong, particularly in healthcare and social assistance.

The council discussed regional variation in labor market conditions, noting differences in job growth and unemployment rates. Western North Carolina was highlighted as a region with ongoing job growth but elevated unemployment rates due to Hurricane Helene. Demographic considerations, such as differences in labor force participation by age and gender, were also discussed. The impact of demographic changes, such as an aging population, on labor force participation was noted.

Survey Feedback and Goal Prioritization

Secretary Lilley reviewed survey feedback from council members, highlighting the main themes and goals identified (see slide deck). The goal of ensuring 2 million North Carolinians have a college degree or credential by 2030 was discussed in detail. The importance of leveraging existing efforts and aligning with state goals was underscored. The council will prioritize goals based on feedback and continue to refine them throughout the process.

In reviewing the main themes identified in the survey, members emphasized the value of a personalized approach—referred to as a “warm touch”—for service members as they transition into civilian life. It was noted that both employers and transitioning service members need better education on how military experience translates to civilian roles. The group highlighted the need for dedicated staff and baseline data to better support individuals making this transition.

Next, the council discussed challenges and opportunities in vocational training. The members discussed that high school students who complete Career Technical Education (CTE) programs tend to have higher graduation rates. The group discussed the opportunity to engage more students in vocational pathways, particularly considering the concerning statistic that 40% of high school students do not pursue any post-secondary degree or credential. It was agreed that getting students actively credentialed and engaged in the labor market should be a priority.

Credential and Degree Attainment

The Council began reviewing the potential goal topics with credentials and degree attainment. The members discussed the importance of credential data and career development planning. Clarification was provided regarding the difficulty in tracking credentials, and a recent legislative requirement for students to complete assessments on career interests was introduced. Participants stressed the need to align secondary and post-secondary educational offerings with employer needs. A recurring theme was the importance of exposing students to local job opportunities, especially for those who do not have role models with stable employment at home.

Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship

The council then moved into a discussion about pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs. An overview was provided to explain the goals and differences between the two types of programs. Attendees noted the value of internships and other work-based learning opportunities and cited successful pre-apprenticeship models in Surry County, North Carolina. There was general agreement that more awareness and understanding of registered apprenticeship programs is needed. The Council acknowledged the Governor’s goal of doubling the number of apprentices within four years and co-chairs shared this goal would likely be adopted.

Work-Based Learning and Employer Engagement

Employer engagement in work-based learning was identified as a critical success factor. Participants emphasized the importance of building a continuum of experiences for students, ranging from career

awareness to internships and ultimately apprenticeships. The idea of leveraging paid internships to incentivize employer participation was raised, along with the need for a broader cultural shift that positions apprenticeships as a standard and expected path for students.

Labor Market Alignment and Sector-Based Strategies

Labor market alignment and sector-based strategies were also discussed. There was consensus on the importance of ensuring that CTE programs reflect current workforce needs. Specific attention was given to the healthcare and education sectors, with particular emphasis on subfields such as nursing, direct care, and behavioral health.

State Government Employment and Work-Based Learning

The group also examined challenges and opportunities in state government employment. Concerns were raised about vacancy rates and staff retention. Suggestions included offering more work-based learning opportunities within state agencies and leveraging remote work to attract candidates from rural areas. Finally, it was noted that as AI is more integrated into all sectors, a skilled and adaptable workforce will be essential to remain competitive.

Action Items

The council agreed to review progress on these action items at the next scheduled meeting:

- Labor Market Data: Research demographic considerations, such as differences in labor force participation by age and gender.
- Labor Market Data: Analyze the impact of demographic changes, such as an aging population, on labor force participation.
- Labor Market Data: Analyze regional labor market data to identify specific sectors and credentials that should be prioritized.
- CTE: Investigate the current percentage of high school students involved in vocational/technical training programs and identify opportunities to expand access.
- CTE: Develop strategies to better promote the value and opportunities in trade-based careers to students and their families.
- Braiding Funding: Explore leveraging Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to support pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for underserved populations.
- Work-based Learning: Explore opportunities better identify and measure work-based learning across multiple sectors.
- Target Populations: Continue to discuss the best ways to engage priority populations such as those re-entering the workforce after incarceration, transitioning military and veterans, and those with disabilities.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Wendy Johnson

Date: April 16, 2025

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