

# Building Degree Apprenticeships in North Carolina

A State-Led Approach to Expanding Earn-and-Learn Pathways



## Why Degree Apprenticeships?

### STATE CHALLENGE

North Carolina has a long history of work-based learning, yet it faces the same workforce pressures as many states: healthcare and teacher shortages and the challenge of retaining talent in local communities. Degree apprenticeships translate work experience into academic credit and connect students to careers within the state.

In March 2025, Governor Josh Stein established the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships, which set 11 goals and 30 strategies to expand apprenticeship, including embedding credentials and degrees into apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

### WHAT MAKES NC DISTINCT

There is no separate degree apprenticeship track. Instead, associate and bachelor's degrees are embedded into Registered Apprenticeship program design through ApprenticeshipNC, housed in the NC Community College System.

#### STATE

North Carolina

#### PRIORITY SECTORS

Healthcare, Education,  
Advanced  
Manufacturing

#### CURRENT STATUS

Established system with  
ongoing expansion;  
statewide articulation  
agreements in  
development

#### PROGRAMS

16 occupational training  
groups with associate  
degree apprentices  
across the community  
college system

# 3,234

EMPLOYER PARTNERS

# 10,341

APPRENTICES SERVED

# 16

OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING GROUPS

ApprenticeshipNC, 2026 Q1, across all apprenticeship programs.

# Building the Foundation

## GOVERNANCE

ApprenticeshipNC and the community college system lead cross-agency coordination while the Governor's Council sets and tracks goals. In 2017, HB 646 moved ApprenticeshipNC from the Department of Commerce into the community college system, aligning apprenticeship programming directly with degree offerings and curriculum development.

### LESSON FOR OTHER STATES

Structurally aligning apprenticeship offices and higher education agencies significantly reduces friction in program development and ensures competencies, curriculum, and employer needs are built together from the start.

### CORE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships  
ApprenticeshipNC  
NC Community College System

### KEY STAKEHOLDERS

NCWorks  
NC Career Launch  
Workforce Development Boards  
Department of Public Instruction  
K-12 partners and local education agencies

# Sector Strategy and Program Design

NC's priorities in healthcare, education, and advanced manufacturing reflect Governor Stein's push for tighter alignment between employers, education, and workforce systems.

# 16

SEMESTER CREDIT  
HOURS

Community colleges can award up to 16 semester credit hours for work-based learning in Associate of Applied Science programs aligned with a Registered Apprenticeship, letting employers ensure curricula reflect on-the-job competencies. Employers such as Duke Energy have used this flexibility to co-design pathways with community colleges.

## FORWARD LOOK

The community college system plans statewide articulation agreements so apprentices can continue past two-year degrees.

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## Employer Engagement

Driven by the Governor's goal of engaging 50,000 employers. Most employers engage through advisory boards for academic programs at community colleges; superintendents also hold one-on-one meetings with top employers and leverage local workforce boards.

### Good Jobs Western NC

Launched after Hurricane Helene, coordinating all 11 western community colleges with employers and philanthropy so training pathways match labor market needs.

### AdvanceNC

Regional partnership led by Central Carolina Community College that worked with manufacturers to design an entry-level advanced manufacturing program from scratch, with plans to articulate it into a two-year degree.



*Some employers prefer in-house instruction and shorter non-degree options. Programs must balance immediate workforce needs with keeping degree completion at the center.*

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## Funding and Sustainability

**\$3M**

In recurring state funds for ApprenticeshipNC in the most recent budget, plus direct employer and philanthropic grants to colleges.

**120 days**

Community college tuition waiver for high school students who begin a Registered Apprenticeship within 120 days of graduation, connected to NCWorks Career Centers for WIOA-funded equipment and supplies.

**BUILT-IN INCENTIVE**

Enrollment-based college funding creates a built-in incentive: strong programs draw students, which draws more funding for expansion.

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## Early Results and Impact

NC is building its metrics infrastructure: a public outcomes dashboard, a CRM for longitudinal tracking, credentialing test outcomes, and detailed high-school-to-completion data for tuition waiver students.

### EVALUATION FINDING

ApprenticeshipNC evaluations show degree apprenticeship training between 2001 and 2020 produced stronger wage growth trajectories, both short and long term, than Registered Apprenticeship alone.

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## Governor's Action Items

01

### Establish a clear governance structure

Shared goals and structured accountability move the work beyond individual agency initiatives.

02

### Structurally align apprenticeship and higher education

Creates a single channel for curriculum and competency development.

03

### Invest in recurring state funds

Braided federal and philanthropic funding gets programs off the ground; recurring state appropriations sustain and scale them.

04

### Build regional employer partnerships

Advisory boards, executive outreach, and regional coalitions keep programs responsive while reducing burden on individual employers.