



Eastern Carolina
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD, INC.

2020 Strategic Plan

“Thriving firms, prosperous workers, and vibrant communities.”





OUR VISION

Our Vision for Eastern North Carolina is a qualified workforce with an educational attainment level that meets the needs of local firms so they can compete in today's marketplace.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to develop the workforce through a collaborative, customer-focused approach that facilitates partnerships between job seekers, workers, employers, and educators, aligning workforce requirements to economic needs.

OUR VALUE

We add economic value to our community by ensuring that our public workforce system is responsive in meeting the education and training needs of our job seekers and employers alike, thereby leading to a better quality of life and ensuring employers have access to the skilled workforce they need, resulting in a thriving economy.

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The Eastern Carolina Workforce Development Board [ECWDB] is pleased to present our updated 2020 Strategic Plan, which sets our strategic priorities and guides our efforts to strengthen the region's workforce for the coming years.

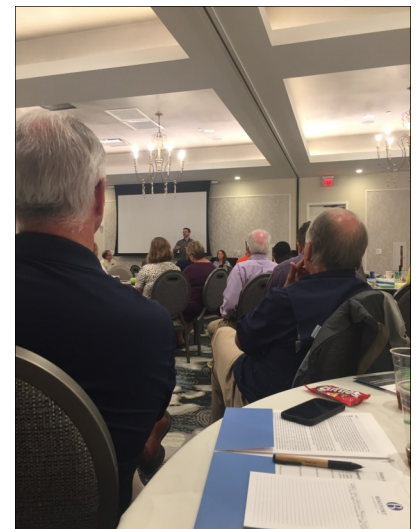
BACKGROUND

Prior to the strategic planning session, on June 13, 2019, the ECWDB executive committee conducted a SWOT analysis, revisited the vision and mission statement and reviewed data and labor market information to help shape the board priorities to be addressed as part of the strategic plan.



On September 13 & 14, 2019, the ECWDB and the neighboring workforce development boards held a combined strategic planning retreat. The six boards have held these planning retreats since 2005. This influential partnership consists of Eastern Carolina, Cape Fear, Lumber River, Northeastern, Region Q, and Turning Point WDBs representing 37 eastern counties.

Working together, the boards formed the Vision East WDB alliance to ensure alignment in addressing broad workforce challenges that are reflective of the NCWorks Commission's vision for workforce development. The 2019 strategic planning session focused on Governor Cooper's workforce initiatives and the NCWorks Commission's strategies to focus on increased educational attainment levels, engaging private-sector leadership, and local innovation.



Building upon these sessions and prior work, the Board's key strategies and action plan were updated. The development of the strategic plan includes input gathered from board members, youth council members, economic development, local chambers, businesses, community partners, and our customers.

This document is a result of an inclusive and collaborative process that seeks to address the workforce challenges identified within the Eastern Carolina region.



OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of this updated strategic plan is to redefine the Board's priorities and to align the Board's work with the evolving needs of the region's workforce system over the next two years.

The strategic plan update takes into account the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, which seeks to improve job and career options for our region's workers and job seekers through an integrated, job-driven public workforce system that links diverse talent to business needs. It supports the development of a healthy, vibrant regional economy where businesses thrive, and where people want to live and work.

The plan outlines the priorities of the ECWDB to achieve its vision. Adopted from the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, our local workforce system, known as the NCWorks Career Center System, is being characterized by three critical pillars:

- *The needs of businesses and workers drive workforce solutions;*
- *NCWorks Career Centers provide excellent customer service to employers and job seekers and focus on continuous improvement; and*
- *The workforce system partners and staff support a robust regional economy and play an active role in community and workforce development.*

Across the NCWorks Career Center system, continuous improvement occurs through evaluation, accountability, identification of best practices, and data-driven decision making.

The Needs of Businesses and Workers Drive Workforce Solutions:



Local businesses inform and guide the workforce system and access skilled talent as they shape regional workforce investments and build a pipeline of skilled workers. This engagement includes leadership in the workforce system and active participation in the development and provision of education and training, work-based learning, career pathways, and industry sector partnerships. Job seekers and workers, including those individuals with barriers to employment such as people with disabilities, have the information and guidance to make informed decisions about training and careers, as well as access to the education, training and support services they need to compete in current and future labor markets.



NCWorks Career Centers Provide Excellent Customer Service to Job seekers, Workers, and Employers and Focus on Continuous Improvement:

NCWorks Career Centers and partners provide job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, such as people with disabilities, with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with family-sustaining wages. Additionally, NCWorks Career Centers enable employers to quickly identify and hire skilled workers and access other support, including education and training for their current workforce.



The NCWorks Workforce System Supports A Strong Regional Economy:

Meeting workforce needs is critical to economic growth. The State and local workforce development boards—in partnership with the workforce, economic development, education, and social service organizations at the state, regional and local levels—align education and training investments to regional civic and economic growth strategies, ensuring that all job seekers and businesses can access pathways to prosperity.



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OUR KEY STRATEGIES

The Eastern Carolina WDB's key strategies include:

- Certify an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce development system.
- Engage business and community leaders in addressing workforce issues and promote strategies to improve education levels and essential workplace skills.
- Implement a community awareness plan that promotes education, life-long learning, and the workforce development services that are available for both job seekers and employers.
- Identify and implement effective career pathways strategies that result in employment opportunities for all citizens.
- Establish an accountability system that builds the capacity of the Eastern Carolina WDB, staff, NCWorks partners, and service providers in addressing regional workforce needs.
- Strengthen alliances with economic development to identify and address workforce needs of current and future industries.
- Increase educational attainment levels for in-school and out-of-school youth.

OUR BELIEFS

- The ECWDB provides leadership to ensure that our workforce system is customer-focused and responsive in meeting the needs of employers and job seekers alike.
- The development of a strong economy for NC depends upon having a supply of educated and well-trained workers who possess the skills needed to make NC's businesses and industries globally competitive.
- Public institutions and public resources play a critical role in the development of an educated, well-trained workforce.
- Improvements to the NC workforce development delivery system must focus on the needs of employers and job seekers and be based on factual, relevant, and timely data.
- The NCWorks Career Center System is the integrated services delivery mechanism that directs job seekers to employment and training, provides business services to employers and links those seeking employment with those seeking to hire.
- NC Works and the workforce development system must adapt quickly to the demands of the 21st Century economy and embrace continuous learning.
- The North Carolina NCWorks System includes all agencies and organizations involved in increasing the quantity and quality of workers in North Carolina, improving worker access to jobs and increasing worker access to information about the availability of employment and training opportunities.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To ensure that the mission is accomplished and achieves the strategic priorities set by the board, it is crucial to identify the responsibilities of the board and staff, NCWorks Career Centers, and Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act service providers.

The responsibilities of the board include:

- Provide strong leadership and engage all stakeholders in addressing workforce challenges so that our communities and neighbors will continue to grow and prosper.
- Increase business involvement in shaping the workforce system.
- Create priorities that fall within the vision of the strategic plan for the workforce system.
- Generate ideas to improve and strengthen workforce strategies and programs.
- Hold the NCWorks system accountable to high standards of quality and performance.
- Promote North Carolina's workforce system in the business community.
- Serve as an advocate for the board and workforce system.

The responsibilities of the staff include:

- Provide leadership and fulfill the day-to-day planning and oversight responsibilities to ensure that strategic priorities are achieved.
- Engage key workforce and economic development partners in addressing strategic priorities and propose ways to leverage resources or apply for new funds.
- Research and inform the board, stakeholders, and community partners about workforce trends and events, state and national policies, and best practices as they relate to the strategic plan objective.
- Pursue grant and funding opportunities that will enhance the local workforce development system.
- Ensure goals and objectives are carried out, and performance goals are achieved.

The responsibilities of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) service providers include:

- Promote the NCWorks Career Center and services available that target eligible Youth, Adults, and Dislocated Workers.
- Provide high-quality workforce solutions by linking job seekers with the workforce system through critical information exchange; continuously engaging job seekers in talent development activities; provide education and training opportunities, work-based learning and job placement services.
- Actively participate in serving NCWorks Career Center customers through a customer-focused, skill-based, Integrated Services Delivery strategy.
- Comply with the terms of the contract entered into by the Board and Service Provider parent agency ensuring that program and financial goals are attained.
- Provide performance reports on contract goals as required by the WDB.

The responsibilities of the NCWorks Career Centers include:

- Achieve a culture of quality customer service that demonstrates improved performance, coordinated access to services, and service delivery accountability so that employers will receive qualified candidates, and job seekers will be provided the opportunity to know their skills, improve their skills, and get the best job possible with their skills.
- Ensure cross-training of their local staff and partners to enhance customer service delivery and support integrated staffing where each Center staff member is knowledgeable about programs and services offered at the Center.
- Continually improve upon the Center's products and services by making improvements as indicated by customer/staff/partner input and feedback.
- Provide high-quality workforce solutions through its integrated service delivery system by linking employers with the workforce system through critical information exchange; continuously engaging employers in talent development activities; and developing and implementing diverse solutions that meet employers' workforce needs.
- Provide reports on Center activities as required by the WDB and participate in relevant State, regional, or local meetings and training.

OUR PROGRESS

The EWDB's progress in addressing these key strategies has been ongoing and is evident through the established partnerships with our regional and local economic developers, community colleges, school systems, businesses, chambers of commerce, and community organizations to ensure that our region is known as a pro-active, forward-thinking region that has a workforce to support local industry. Through our collective efforts, our region is recognized at the State and National levels as a Certified Work Ready Communities Region. The workforce development services in our network of NCWorks Career Centers is also reflective of how the Board is addressing five key strategies to ensure alignment with the NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and vision for North Carolina.

The ECWDB, partners, and staff take great pride in the work that has and continues to occur throughout this region. The shared vision for our region and state continues to move the board forward in new areas that align career development strategies into concise career pathways and focuses on sector strategies that align to the region's high growth, high wage, and high skill demands.

The ECWDB and local workforce development partners are working together to create a talent pipeline that will result in satisfied employers offering long-term employment, sound job retention, and increased earnings. Workforce development services for businesses include recruiting, assessing, screening, and referring candidates; labor market information, work-based learning, on-the-job training, and customized training; pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship, assistive technology and other support for companies. Workforce development services for job seekers include skills assessments, job search assistance, resume preparation, access to job listings, career planning and development, connection to high school completion and GED, occupational skills training, literacy skills training, job search, life skills classes, and support services.

OUR ACTION PLAN

The following pages are the strategies and objectives that the ECWDB, staff, NCWorks partners, and WIOA service providers will continue addressing in this current year. The strategies are assigned to the Board committees/staff to establish performance indicators and monitor progress toward the goals to ensure performance is achieved. The NCWorks Career Center managers, service providers, and ECWDB staff play a pivotal role in ensuring the achievement of this vital work.

The Eastern Carolina WDB, committees, and staff will continue to participate in and/or facilitate meetings with its partners to address action items, revise, update, and evaluate outcomes, and establish priorities and timelines as warranted. The plan will be updated and provided to the ECWDB Executive Committee at their bi-monthly meetings.

OUR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The ECWDB will use the following indicators to evaluate the overall performance of the local workforce system. Current data will be obtained to establish a realistic benchmark for progress.

- A continually growing workforce;
- A lower unemployment rate;
- An increase in number of people entering targeted career pathways;
- An increase in students enrolling in and completing education and training programs that expand and complement the traditional four-year college option, including certificate-based training, apprenticeship, and two-year degrees;
- An increase in job readiness among high school graduates;
- An increase in high school completion rates;
- An increase in people participating in continuing education activities;
- An increase in literacy rates among the Region's population;
- A decrease in number of people on public assistance;
- Return on investment data based upon wage earnings; and
- Local WIOA Performance Goals.

Strategy 1: Create an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce system.

The ECWDB's responsibility is to design a system that provides economic opportunity for everyone who wants to go to work, find a better job, or improve their skills to succeed in the current and future workforce. WDBs are tasked with identifying great practices and fostering truly innovative solutions, from technological solutions (e.g. to integrate data platforms across agencies) to program solutions (developing career pathways for sectors), identifying the hard to serve populations within the community, and how best to streamline operations and service delivery. WDBs are to measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services.

Report to NCWorks Business Services Committee

Objective	ECWDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
1.1. Continue efforts to ensure Integrated Service Delivery practices are occurring in Centers.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Evaluate Center performance based upon Certification criteria to assess how the integrated service delivery system is working. Gauge meaningful feedback from staff, employers, and job seeker customers.
1.2. Build the capacity of the NCWorks Career Center system to deliver a greater variety of services to employers and job seekers.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Ensure that 100% career center staff participate in the Facilitating Career Development Certification program and complete the Welcome to Workforce online sessions. Broker specialized training sessions that focus on improving customer services.
1.3. Use data to drive operational efficiency. Data-driven decisions can ensure that workforce, educational, and economic development strategies are based on accurate assessments of regional labor markets and can inform improvements to customer experiences.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Review quarterly NCWorks performance dashboards that reflect center performance toward the achievement of job seeker and employer goals. Pilot the customer service feedback system to gauge customer satisfaction of NCWorks services.
1.4. Implement one innovative program or practice that improves integrated service delivery, job training, or employment services. Create a process to reward local innovation.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Challenge center managers and service providers to seek out best practices and strategies that result in special populations becoming gainfully employed.

Strategy 2: Engage business and community leaders in addressing workforce issues and promote strategies to improve basic workforce skills.

WDB are to build sector-based, regional, and cross discipline teams and exploit the increased flexibility under WIOA to engage businesses. Likewise, business engagement begins with the ECWDB as individual members bring their experience and existing networks to the board. Many Board members serve on other important business or community councils, committees, and boards. These entities may have discussions about employment and training issues that can be brought back to the workforce board. These contacts can also be used to share positive information about Workforce Development Board activities that are occurring within the region. As appropriate, the board encourages its membership to take a leadership role in their respective county by participating in various stakeholder meetings with workforce, education, and/or economic development groups in order to share their knowledge, experiences, and expertise gained in crafting workforce solutions. WDB's can engage the business community through providing business services and as a partner in sector strategies and work-based learning.

Report to NCWorks Business Services Committee

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
2.1. Inventory existing businesses in each county.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Acquire business contact information and work with NCWorks Business Engagement teams to contact employers in an effort to address talent recruitment efforts. Increase businesses registering on NCWorks services by June 30, 2020 by 10%.
2.2. Develop a regional business engagement strategy that will focus on reaching out to local business identified in the following targeted pathways: Health Science, Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation, Skilled Trades, Aerospace & Aviation, and Hospitality & Tourism	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	NCWorks Career Centers to sponsor or participate in at least four employer events that will highlight the benefits of accessing NCWorks employer services to address workforce needs. Success will be measured by participating employers using NCWorks services as verified by NCWorks Online.
2.3. Convene business focus groups to help the Board and NCWorks partners better understand the needs of industries and make connections with other business leaders in the community.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff (WIOA Titles I & III), & partners	Host business roundtable sessions in each of the counties to focus on the local businesses' workforce needs and create solutions. Success will be measured by the documented workforce solutions created as a result.

Strategy 3: Implement a community awareness plan that promotes education, life-long learning and the workforce development services that are available for both job/training seekers and employers.

As a part of the 2019 Vision East board retreat, the WDBs addressed two broad goals: increasing educational attainment levels and broadening business engagement. All agree that a good education is the foundation for a strong workforce. A youth or adult who completes high school and enrolls in a community college training program is more likely to participate in the workforce, have a job, work more hours and earn more, and less likely to be unemployed. The benefits of education go beyond the economic returns. Higher levels of education also correspond to improved health, lower rates of mortality, and lower rates of crime which is why the ECWDB is adding these criteria to the overall performance metric for evaluating workforce effectiveness.

Report to Executive Committee

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
3.1. Raise visibility and public awareness of the Governor's educational attainment goals and the myFutureNC campaign to promote the region's community colleges and NCWorks workforce development partner services and resources available.	ECWDB member and Staff, NCWorks partners	ECWDB to develop a communications plan that will highlight the need for a skilled workforce and promote the NCWorks system to include outreach strategies and identify resources to support them.
3.2. Promote access to workforce training programs in high-demand careers.	ECWDB staff, NCWorks partners, Career Pathways committee, , WIOA service providers,	Review 2018 data and seek to increase Title I enrollments 10% in the region's identified career pathways.
3.3. Partner with community colleges and adult literacy councils to promote literacy services.	ECWDB Staff, NCWorks partners	Establish a plan of action in partnership with literacy councils and community colleges to increase enrollments and educational attainment outcomes.
3.4 Develop a return on investment model that captures the ECWDB performance indicators for success.	ECWDB Executive Committee, Staff	Research and consider utilizing a firm to develop a process for collecting the performance measures data.

Strategy 4: Ensure effective career pathways strategies that result in employment opportunities for all citizens.

Talent is the lifeblood of economic growth and, as the economy continues to create jobs, companies will need more help than ever in finding, training and retaining talent. Businesses across industry sectors continue to report they're having a hard time finding workers with the right skills for their jobs. Our work plays a central role in building the talent pipeline for the future. In overseeing WIOA Title I funds, the Board, consistent with their strategic plan, oversight, and evaluation, uses competitive procurement to determine the best methods for disbursing funds for workforce employment and training services. Services are funded through WIOA Title I federal resources and that funding comes with rules regarding expenditure and performance expectations. WDBs must ensure that Title I WIOA service providers comply with all applicable rules regarding funding and service provision and that they meet performance standards. Funding is tied to performance targets set by the federal government.

Report to NCWorks Career Pathways Committee

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
<p>4.1. Maintain a regional inventory of education and training programs available that align with the current and emerging sector clusters.</p> <p>Develop a proactive strategy to promote the Region's career pathways that offer high growth, high wage, and in-demand employment opportunities.</p>	NCWorks Career Pathways Committee, ECWDB staff	<p>Ensure WIOA training opportunities are aligned with the Region's sectors strategies. Produce and distribute the career pathways outreach materials to all nine county school systems, NCWorks Centers, and partners.</p> <p>Direct WIOA Title I funding toward career pathways in demand to see an increase of 2% in enrollment in targeted sectors. Reward providers based upon outcomes.</p>
4.2. Assess eligible training providers and programs to ensure that performance objectives are met.	NCWorks Career Pathways Committee, ECWDB Staff, and WIOA service provider staff	<p>Evaluate and fund training programs that result in employment. Eliminate training programs from the approved list that do not result in meaningful training related career pathways employment outcomes.</p> <p>Title I service providers to provide a quarterly performance report on credentials and employment outcomes.</p>
4.3. Promote NCWorks work-based learning opportunities to local businesses.	NCWorks Career Pathways Committee, ECWDB Staff, WIOA service providers	WIOA Title I service providers to increase WBL by 10%.

Strategy 5: Build the capacity of the Consortium, Eastern Carolina WDB, and NCWorks Career Center staff and partners.

The WDB is not the only entity responsible for building a world class workforce system. The power lies in being able to set the vision and convene the right partners together to broker a more comprehensive set of solutions. The WDB is to build and nurture strong local partnerships with community organizations, including businesses, education, and economic development. Under WIOA, WDBs convene, collaborate, and host statewide and community conversations that help Board members understand the complexity of their regional markets and make decisions about how to align workforce resources. By implementing the responsibilities and duties given to local WDBs by federal and state law, boards develop effective strategic initiatives, as local boards serve as the point of contact for assessing the skills of businesses and are entrusted to influence the direction of workforce programs through local strategic planning. Likewise, local WDBs, in their comprehensive evaluation of workforce services, must also monitor the overall effectiveness of one-stop centers and related workforce programs. All of these activities represent the ECWDB's strategic role in workforce development.

Report to Executive Committee

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
5.1. Host a Workforce Summit to highlight regional workforce challenges and solutions.	Executive Committee, ECWDB Staff, NCWorks partners	Sponsor an annual workforce summit to focus on the emerging talent pipeline concerns as a way to bring businesses together with other partners and raise awareness and understanding of the workforce programs and systems. The goal is for employers, educators, community agencies, foundations, and other partners to benefit directly from listening to businesses about what is happening in the marketplace and how they are dealing with recruitment and retention issues.
5.2 Facilitate a training session with the Consortium and WDB members to discuss roles and responsibilities as required by WIOA.	ECWDB Staff	Provide an annual orientation and training opportunity for the newer county managers, elected officials, WDB members, and NCWorks Career Center managers to fully understand roles, responsibilities, and funding as it relates to WIOA and broad workforce development needs.
5.3. Continue Regional WDB Vision East Strategic Planning efforts to ensure alignment with strategic goals and evaluate progress.	ECWDB Staff	Host annual Vision East planning retreat with the six eastern WDBs. Participate in a joint WDB meeting with Cape Fear WDB to ensure strategic plan alignment of goals and regional expectations.

Strategy 6: Strengthen alliances with economic development to identify and address workforce needs of current and future industries.

For the past decade, the ECWDB has continued to build and foster strong economic development partnerships. These efforts of collaboration are evidenced by the Region being known as the first North Carolina Region to be designated as a Work Ready Certified Community. Economic Developers continue to report that Workforce Development is their number one priority for recruiting new industry and assisting local firms with expansion efforts. Under WIOA, workforce and economic development partnerships are critical to developing regional sector strategies and creating and ensuring a successful economy.

Report to Executive Committee

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
6.1. Facilitate an Economic Development Roundtable discussion to broaden the WDB's understanding of local economic development efforts and discuss regional workforce challenges and solutions.	ECWDB, Business Services Staff, NCWorks Career Center staff	Establish a regional economic development partnership that will convene at least annually to address broad workforce and economic development priorities.
6.2. Partner with local economic developers in the use of salesforce software to improve coordination of business services activities.	ECWDB Business Services Staff	Ensure open lines of communications by utilizing a common database to record business services and contacts.
6.3. Promote the benefits of a Certified Work Ready Community.	ECWDB staff, Business Services team, NCWorks	Revitalize the Work Ready Communities efforts to promote a skilled workforce.

Strategy 7: Increase educational attainment for in-school and out-of-school youth.

Workforce development provides opportunities for WDB's to provide leadership to connect, train, and educate young adults for careers that help businesses and our economy thrive. Youth and young adults exposure to these opportunities are critical to the talent pipeline needed for a strong economy. The ECWDB continues to incorporate new strategies to remove roadblocks and engage young adults ages 16-24 who face barriers to employment. As our economy grows, the vast majority of new jobs require more than a high school diploma. The ECWDB will provide a leadership role in empowering youth and bolstering our region's growing workforce, by coordinating efforts and working collaboratively with the public schools, community colleges, businesses, and other partners.

Report to Youth Council

Objective	WDB/Staff	Performance Indicator
7.1. Identify sources of career awareness. Organize round tables regarding opportunities that focus on how Youth decide on and plan for a career.	School counselors, CTE staff, NCWorks career center staff, WIOA Title I providers, WDB staff, students (identified by school staff), employers	Increase number of students enrolling into programs that lead to high-demand/high-wage careers by 1%.
7.2. Educate/engage school administration, school counselors and community college advisors on career pathways. Implement training for K-12, community college and NCWorks staff on career pathways, assessments, labor market information, etc.	WDB staff, K-12 front-line staff and administration, community college advisors and administration, NCWorks staff, WIOA Title I providers	Increase awareness of regionally supported career pathways, advising and LMI for front-line advising staff and administration for 25 staff members.
7.3. Fund and move forward with one new, innovative program. Develop and implement a pilot program for at-risk in-school youth.	NCWorks career center staff, WIOA Title I providers, WDB Staff, WDB Youth Council members, Employers, K-12 staff/CTE	Increase graduation rate by 1%.
7.4. Strengthen partnership between NCWorks and high schools. Work with CTE Directors to educate 11 th and 12 th grade students about the services provided by NCWorks, encourage registration in the system.	NCWorks career center staff, WDB staff, CTE staff	Increase number of young job seekers receiving services such as summer employment through the NCWorks career centers by 1%.

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