

Developing Local Students of All Ages to Meet Workforce Demands

CULTIVATING A LOCAL WORKFORCE SUPPLY FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH RETIREMENT AGE

K-64 LEARNING

k-64learning.com



Rural counties nationwide are experiencing declines in their working-age population as more young adults move to urban areas. The outmigration of young people presents a pressing challenge for employers in rural communities as they seek to recruit qualified, work-ready employees to meet their current hiring demands. For example, employers in Catawba County, North Carolina are currently seeking to fill more than 3,000 jobs across a variety of industries and expect to add 10,000 new jobs by 2035. However, it is estimated that Catawba County will have a net loss of 1,105 employable workers aged 18-64 by 2035.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- A countywide approach to developing a talent pipeline that meets local workforce needs
- Collaboration with business, education, and community leaders to engage students of all ages
- Does not “re-invent the wheel,” but rather expands existing successful programs
- Cultivates life-long learning to respond to shifts in the labor market

Without intervention, these data demonstrate a significant talent shortage in the local workforce. Recognizing this pertinent issue, public and private stakeholders in Catawba County joined forces to collectively identify strategies for cultivating a skilled workforce. Together, the stakeholders wanted to develop a strategy that would brand Catawba County as a desirable place to work, live, and raise a family.

Conversations between business, community, and education leaders highlighted several opportunities to strengthen the talent pipeline in Catawba County. To begin, education programs in Catawba County needed stronger collaboration with local employers to develop curricula that fulfill workforce needs. Strategic partnerships between local schools and businesses help prepare students for the local workforce. Catawba County students also needed to be educated about careers and associated curriculum choices early in their educational journeys. By being introduced to the different careers in their formative years, students have improved awareness about career development, training, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, adults in Catawba County needed to gain new skills

to remain competitive in the workforce. As the workforce continues to evolve, adults need to stay agile and shift with it, upgrading their skills as necessary. These leaders identified existing programs working to remedy each of these talent concerns and achieving success; however, their work was not being disseminated throughout the county. These concerns, and the accompanying lack of coordination of existing programs that addressed these concerns, underscored the need for a systemic approach to link students' interests and abilities with employers' needs. Taking all this into consideration, K-64 emerged.

Launched in 2017, the K-64 initiative is a public-private partnership created by the Catawba County Commissioners and operated by Catawba Valley Community College. The key focus of K-64 is to prepare students for local in-demand careers throughout their lifetime from kindergarten (K) through the typical retirement age (64). The K-64 initiative builds on the existing success of proven best practices by identifying, inventorying, and expanding programs that are effective in at least one of three areas: (1) working in partnership with local employers to design educational curricula that correspond with workforce demands, (2) providing students early exposure to career options and associated education and training requirements, or (3) supporting ongoing skill development for adults. A Commissioner-appointed, 12-member Board of Directors provides leadership for the K-64 initiative.

PARTNERSHIPS



NEWTON-CONOVER
CITY SCHOOLS



HICKORY
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS



CATAWBA
COUNTY
SCHOOLS



CATAWBA COUNTY



CATAWBA VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



CATAWBA COUNTY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



CATAWBA COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

K-64 HAS SIX PRIORITIES:

- **One-to-World Technology:** Providing students access to technology to enhance their learning both at school and at home.
- **Character and Soft Skills Development:** Training students in soft skills necessary for career advancement such as goal setting, communication, and working well with others
- **Tech Savvy Educators:** Training teachers how to utilize technology to enhance the learning experience
- **Work-based Learning:** Connecting students and employers through job shadowing, internships, co-ops, work-study programs, and apprenticeships.
- **Employer Engagement:** Developing partnerships with local business leaders to develop the local talent pool
- **Career Adaptability:** Providing access to continuing education for adults

PROGRAM FUNDING

Commissioners agreed to provide up to \$1.3 million seed funding each year for five years with a match stipulation that varies by year:

- 50% match to the county funds in year one from 2017-2018 (i.e., the county doubled the funding that K-64 raised)
- 100% match to county funds in year two from 2018-2019 (i.e., the county will give equal funds to the amount that K-64 raises)
- Required to raise \$300,000 in years three, four, and five (2019-2022).

Since 2017, K-64 raised \$500,000 in private sector investments from local companies. Currently, K-64 is seeking additional funding such as grants and business donations.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

K-64 has set three to five outcomes for each of its priority areas (One-To-World Technology, Character and Soft Skills Development, Tech Savvy Educators, Work-based Learning, Employer Engagement, and Career Adaptability). Each of these outcomes represents how K-64 measures their success in those priority areas. Notable outcomes include:

- 1,900 Chromebooks distributed to all Catawba County 7th graders
- \$100,000 invested in teacher technology training across all K-12 school systems in Catawba County
- 140 businesses engaged with 735 students in work-based learning opportunities
- 2,048 credentials issued

ABOUT THE SERIES

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. The commission's mission is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, effective workforce development system that meets the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.