



## **NCWorks Certified Career Pathways – Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathway**

**November 13, 2024**



The Cape Fear Workforce Development Board submits the Advanced Manufacturing Pathway application for NCWorks certification consideration. This pathway is a product of input from regional employers, educational/training providers and workforce and economic development agencies dedicated to providing a pipeline of skilled workers to support the economic growth of the Cape Fear region.

The Cape Fear region consists of Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover and Pender counties with a combined estimated population of over 502,595. Industry response during pathway discussion revealed a Career Pathway is needed and should be developed to support industry needs while simultaneously providing employment opportunities with high wage growth potential.

A career pathway that meets the criteria for certification would position our region to develop skilled workers for the regional manufacturing industry, narrow the skills gap for technical positions in the field, and have a positive impact on the regional workforce. The Cape Fear Workforce Development Board leadership decided to move forward with a regional approach to solving the problem.

The region has a rich history in manufacturing, beginning with the industries of wagon building, textiles, furniture manufacturing and ship building, progressing to modern aerospace and aviation controls manufacturing of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Continued growth in the sector is supported by existing infrastructure including transportation via rail, modern interstate highways, and the Port of Wilmington. These key resources facilitate access to global supply chains, while providing a vehicle to transport products to market. In addition, strong investments in water and sewer expansion, modernizing electrical grids, and implementing Green Energy options create additional incentives for growth and expansion in the manufacturing sector.

The Cape Fear Workforce Development Board engages with training partners such as public universities and community colleges creating opportunities for a skilled workforce to support sustainability for new investments in the region. Based on Lightcast data projections, manufacturing related employment experienced 11% growth from 2018 to 2024 in the Cape Fear Region. Currently, employers are facing multiple workforce challenges including a shortage of skilled and unskilled labor to fill their open positions along with the impending retirement risk in manufacturing our area. Lightcast data shows that the national average for an area the size of the Cape Fear region is 3,064 employees 55 or older, while there are 3,305 in the Cape Fear region as of Q1 2024 Data Set.

Based on industry feedback there are several causes for the labor shortage and this input was utilized as verification for developing an Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathway. Formulation of this pathway was composed of individuals representing Local Education Agencies, Community College leadership, NCWorks staff, and Cape Fear Workforce Development staff from across the four-county region.

Skilled talent in this high demand industry is vital to the continued growth of the Cape Fear Region. The Cape Fear Workforce Development Board, along with the LEA's, Community Colleges, NCWorks, and Community partners are committed to serving employers and citizens by continued collaboration to ensure the region is producing the much-needed skilled advanced manufacturing workforce for the benefit of both the job seeker and the business.