



The Competitive Force in our Global Economy

A Campaign for Life-Long Learning in Centralina

Executive Summary

We want to ensure prosperity for all our citizens in the 21st Century. However, our economy has changed making this goal more challenging than ever.

It is no longer a matter of being the most attractive region for business in North Carolina or even the US. We are competing with the world. Concurrently, the definition of a well-paying job and a career are shifting. For example, the top ten jobs predicted for 2010 didn't even exist in 2004. Today's students will have an estimated 10-14 different jobs before age 40.

In our region, we have a 20th Century culture of education in a 21st Century economy. Our culture was shaped by a mill legacy where well-paying jobs didn't require continuous education and learning. As a result, our workers often lack literacies needed for the workplace – not only reading, writing and mathematics, but also soft skills, like team work and customer service, and basic work ethics. When we do have citizens pursuing higher education, they often focus solely on four-year degrees, not even considering the trade or two-year degrees that can be a path to middle class life.

We have resources and organizations to help our children and neighbors prepare to enter the new workforce, but we lack the synergy to maximize our impact.

In response, the Centralina Workforce Development Board convened leaders from Anson, Cabarrus, Iredell, Lincoln, Rowan, Stanly, and Union in all sectors - K-12 education, workforce and economic development, higher education, community-based service providers – to find how we can best prepare our neighbors for the challenges of a 21 century economy. The result of this effort was a plan that not only can guide us to ensuring economic prosperity for our neighbors and children, but also has already started to make new connections among our organizations.



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The plan focuses on four pillars that could have significant impact on our community:

- **Promoting a certified universal skill set** - We heard clearly from employers that they needed an easy, effective way of identifying candidates with the basic literacies for workplace success. We found that the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC), a nationally recognized certification of basic numeracy and literacy, could be a vehicle for meeting this need and helping workers to identify and address their challenges. We propose taking the CRC one step further and creating a CRC+, which also certifies basic soft skills.
- **Promoting trade and two-year degrees** – We want to change the perceptions of trade and two-year degrees so they can be considered a viable option for youth and adults seeking a path to a rewarding, well paid job.
- **Sustaining prosperity** - The current state of financial literacy is such that it can be a negative incentive on lifelong learning. Those who do get better jobs often quickly spend their new wages or fall further into debt and negate the financial benefit of their education. We are working to reverse that trend by not only increasing financial literacy, but also building wealth for those most vulnerable through individual development accounts and other vehicles.
- **Communicating the new economy** - to community leaders and offering our plan as a call to action.

We created bold, achievable goals for each pillar and identified 27 practical strategies, many of which can be implemented with only minor investments of time or money. Signature Strategies include:

- **Creating the CRC+** - to add soft skills testing to the CRC thereby creating a more useful certification for businesses and jobseekers;
- **Enhancing & Promote the CRC+ with high schools** – though a four-phase approach to help link the CRC+ to students;
- **Establishing an Education/Business Forum** - to develop on-going strategies and communication for education (K-12 and Community College) and business partnership;
- **Establishing the Financial Literacy Partnership** - a regional network of Centralina organizations that would provide financial literacy services; identify core principals of effective financial literacy; exchange best practices, and expand the region’s financial literacy and wealth-building services; and
- **Convening a meeting of community-based organizations and educational institutions** - to explore creating, expanding, and improving literacy services as part of their life-long learning system.

Knowing our community's strengths and challenges, the question arises – What can you do to support this work? It is as easy as 1-2-3:

- Commit your organization as **one more partner** in the campaign;
- Adopt at least **two strategies** from the plan; and
- Personally ask **three community leaders** to read this executive summary.

These actions, though seemingly simple, are the critical steps to ensure we are all on a path to prosperity.

For more information, please contact:

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Centralina Workforce Development Board
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As the board responsible for local workforce funding, we invest in our community by partnering with economic development, education, and businesses to create innovative strategies to serve career seekers and businesses. Our mission is very simple - -workforce development. Our vision - - not so simple. It's to make sure that every one of our region's businesses can compete in the global economy with an exceptional workforce and through our network of JobLink Career Centers. We implement the vision and direction of top business leaders to give you a competitive advantage in an ever-changing economy. Think of us as your human resource team. Business friendly; success driven.

For more information, visit our website at www.centralinaworks.com or contact David Hollars at (704) 348-2717.

