STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Legislative Report for the High-Cost Healthcare Start Up and Expansion Grant (FY 2024–2025)

<u>**Request:**</u> For Information

<u>**Strategic Plan Reference:**</u> Goal 4 – Economic and Workforce Development

<u>**Background:**</u>

The State Board of Community Colleges is asked to review the required annual legislative report related to the High-Cost Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant. This report is submitted in accordance with Session Law 2023-134, Section 6.2, and includes details on colleges funded, allocation amounts, program types, allowable use of funds, and evaluation of program success. This statewide initiative is strengthening high-demand healthcare workforce pipelines through targeted investments in new and expanded programs.

<u>**Statutory Requirement:**</u>

This report fulfills Session Law 2023-134, Section 6.2, requiring the System Office to submit an initial report by December 1, 2024, and an annual report thereafter to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee.

<u>**Contact(s):**</u>

Dr. Andrew Gardner

Associate Vice President, Workforce Strategies

NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CREATING SUCCESS

High-Cost Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant

Annual Report – Fiscal Year 2024 - 2025

Due: December 1, 2025

Legislative Requirement

Session Law 2023-134 Section 6.2

Report

The System Office shall submit an initial report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by December 1, 2024, and an annual report thereafter for each year the System Office provides funds to community colleges from the Fund on the programs receiving the funds, which shall include at least the following information:

(1) The community colleges that received funds, the amount of funds, and the types of programs started.

(2) The use of funds by community colleges receiving awards, including costs associated with student instruction, faculty salaries, instructional supplies, related instructional equipment, and accreditation costs.

(3) Evaluation of the success of the new community college programs receiving funds.

Submitted By:

Dr. Jeff Cox, President
North Carolina Community College System
200 West Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
919-807-7100

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Executive Summary

Introduction

North Carolina faces a significant and growing workforce shortage in several key healthcare occupations, including nursing, diagnostic and laboratory technicians, and mental health workers. A combination of factors drives these shortages:

- **Aging Population**: North Carolina's aging population is driving demand for healthcare services, particularly in long-term care, geriatrics, and chronic disease management, all of which require more healthcare workers.
- **Educational Bottlenecks**: Many healthcare programs face capacity issues due to limited faculty, high equipment costs, and accreditation requirements, which restrict the number of graduates entering the workforce.
- **Burnout and Attrition**: High levels of stress and burnout (particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic) and insufficient pay and benefits increase attrition among healthcare workers, particularly in high-demand roles like nursing, EMTs, and medical assistants.
- **Rural vs. Urban Disparities**: Workforce shortages are more acute in rural areas, making attracting and retaining healthcare professionals harder. This creates disparities in access to healthcare across different regions of the state.

The table below provides a comprehensive overview of anticipated trends within various occupational areas, highlighting essential data such as projected employment growth, job openings, and wage estimates. This information was crucial for understanding the evolving labor market and the demand for skilled professionals in different sectors. By analyzing these projections, colleges identified key opportunities that align with workforce development initiatives, ensuring that training programs are responsive to the needs of local and regional economies.

SOC	Description	2024 Jobs	2030 Jobs	2024 - 2030 % Change	Avg. Hourly Earnings	Avg. Annual Openings
31-1128	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	4,306,585	5,060,782	18%	$16.05	811,754
29-1141	Registered Nurses	3,344,457	3,593,909	7%	$45.42	231,331
31-1131	Nursing Assistants	1,440,688	1,526,746	6%	$19.04	226,749
31-9092	Medical Assistants	812,524	909,397	12%	$20.84	125,289
29-2061	Licensed Practical Nurses	669,642	716,477	7%	$29.23	61,133
21-1018	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorders, and Mental Health Workers	431,478	496,085	15%	$28.89	48,755
21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	369,960	396,935	7%	$28.46	33,828
29-2018	Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians	354,620	380,154	7%	$30.22	27,797
29-2034	Radiology Technologists and Technicians	231,404	248,003	7%	$36.18	15,503
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	217,556	235,854	8%	$43.21	17,972
21-1022	Healthcare Social Workers	196,523	216,636	10%	$32.42	20,717
29-2042	Emergency Medical Technicians	172,412	185,163	7%	$20.72	14,958
29-2053	Psychiatric Technicians	129,792	142,237	10%	$20.99	13,234
21-1023	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	123,388	137,063	11%	$30.71	11,314
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	111,697	131,982	18%	$31.66	19,902
29-2043	Paramedics	119,495	126,956	6%	$27.62	7,110
29-2055	Surgical Technologists	116,562	125,085	7%	$29.93	8,692
29-2032	Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	87,550	98,127	12%	$42.80	6,533
21-1015	Rehabilitation Counselors	90,503	95,422	5%	$23.28	8,247
31-9093	Medical Equipment Preparers	70,242	75,057	7%	$22.79	10,543
29-2031	Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians	59,728	63,623	7%	$33.79	4,510
29-2035	Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists	44,401	48,116	8%	$41.64	3,125
31-1133	Psychiatric Aides	37,582	39,096	4%	$19.71	6,112
29-1299	Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners, All Other	35,597	37,596	6%	$59.54	2,429
29-9093	Surgical Assistants	21,604	22,955	6%	$31.84	1,590

Budget Allocations

Addressing these shortages requires a significant investment. In 2023, the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated $55 million in non-recurring funds to assist community colleges in starting new or expanding existing programs in high-demand healthcare occupations while strengthening the state's healthcare workforce pipeline. Funding supported curriculum and short-term workforce continuing education programs. Below is a breakdown of the funding appropriation.

Fiscal Year:	2023-2024	2024-2025	Total Allocation
Funding Cycle:	January 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026	
▪ High-cost, Start-up Funds	$10 Million	$20 Million	$30 Million
▪ Expansion Funds	$10 Million	$15 Million	$25 Million
Total Allocation:	**$20 Million**	**$35 Million**	**$55 Million**

Budget Update (As of October 1, 2025)

	Total Allocation	Remaining Budget	% Spent
High-cost, Start-up Funds	$ 30,000,000	18,587,115	38%
Expansion Funds	$ 25,000,000	$ 10,373,838	59 %
Total Allocation:	$ 55,000,000	$ 23,231,225	

Statewide Statistics

Number of Colleges Funded	58
Number of Projects Awarded	**161**
○ *Start-Up*	*95*
○ *Expansion*	*66*

Rural Connections

Number of Tier 1 Counties Served	41
Number of Projects Awarded	80
Total Allocation	$ 28,638,052
Number of Colleges Funded	32

Requirement #1: Colleges Funded

Table 1: Allocations by College and Program Type

College	Total Grants	Total Allocation	Start-Up	Expansion	*AEMT
Alamance CC	4	$1,424,300	Nursing & Vet Tech	EMS	AEMT
Asheville-Buncombe TCC	3	$1,174,300	Behavioral Health	Nurse Aide	AEMT
Beaufort CC	2	$424,300	Nursing		AEMT
Bladen CC	2	$424,300		EMS	AEMT
Blue Ridge CC	3	$924,300	Respiratory Therapy	EMS	AEMT
Brunswick CC	3	$743,597		Dental Assisting & Nursing	AEMT
Caldwell CCTI	3	$1,346,590	Surgical Technology	EMS & Sonography	
Cape Fear CC	4	$1,324,300	Neurodiagnostic Tech	Nursing & CT/ MRI	AEMT
Carteret CC	3	$1,400,000	Dental Assisting & Surgical Tech	Nursing	
Catawba Valley CC	3	$933,340	Radiographic Assistant	Nursing	AEMT
Central Carolina CC	3	$1,258,132	Physical Therapy Assistant	Nursing & Nurse Aid	
Central Piedmont CC	3	$924,300	Radiography	Nursing	AEMT
Cleveland CC	4	$1,800,000	Sonography & Medical Lab Tech	Nursing & Radiography	
Coastal Carolina CC	2	$424,300		Nursing	AEMT
College of The Albemarle	2	$524,300	Dental Assisting		AEMT
Craven CC	2	$779,543	Surgical Technology	Nursing	
Davidson-Davie CC	3	$924,300	Radiography	EMS	AEMT
Durham TCC	3	$899,041	Orthopedic Technician	EMS	AEMT
Edgecombe CC	3	$489,364		Respiratory Therapy & Nurse Aide	AEMT
Fayetteville TCC	3	$1,499,797	Cardiovascular	Nursing & Respiratory Therapy	
Forsyth Tech CC	3	$924,300	Central Sterile Processing	Nursing	AEMT
Gaston College	4	$1,674,300	Sonography & Surg Tech	EMS	AEMT
Guilford Tech CC	3	$924,300	Medical Sonography	Nursing	AEMT
Halifax CC	2	$900,000	Dental Assisting	Nursing	
Haywood CC	2	$424,300		EMS	AEMT
Isothermal CC	2	$900,000	Dental Hygiene	EMS	
James Sprunt CC	3	$924,297	Surgical Technology	EMS	AEMT
Johnston CC	4	$1,424,300	Respiratory Therapy & Surg Tech	Nurse Aide	AEMT
Lenoir CC	2	$421,029		Nursing	AEMT
Martin CC	4	$1,319,860	Nursing	EMS & PTA	AEMT
Mayland CC	3	$1,024,300	Dental Assisting & Medical Lab Tech		
McDowell TCC	2	$735,300	Human Service Technology	Nursing	
Mitchell CC	2	$900,000	Dental Assisting	Nursing	
Montgomery CC	2	$900,000	EMS & Dental Hygiene	Nursing	
Nash CC	1	$400,000		EMS	
Pamlico CC	2	$836,000	Massage Therapy	Nurse Aide	
Piedmont CC	5	$1,824,300	Nursing & Medical Sonography	EMS & Nursing	AEMT
Pitt CC	3	$637,997	EMS	Dental Assisting	AEMT
Randolph CC	2	$900,000	Mammography	Radiography	

College	Total Grants	Total Allocation	Start-Up	Expansion	*AEMT
Richmond CC	2	$712,816		Surgical Technology (2)	
Roanoke-Chowan CC	3	$924,300	Nursing	EMS	AEMT
Robeson CC	3	$1,024,300	Dental Assisting & Sonography		AEMT
Rockingham CC	2	$422,923		Nursing	AEMT
Rowan-Cabarrus CC	4	$1,176,432	Massage Therapy	EMS & Nursing	AEMT
Sampson CC	3	$824,300		EMS & Nursing	AEMT
Sandhills CC	2	$888,000	EMS	Medical Assisting	
South Piedmont CC	5	$1,824,300	Surgical Tech & PTA	EMS & Nursing	AEMT
Southeastern CC	3	$924,300	Nursing	EMS	AEMT
Southwestern CC	3	$1,024,300	Dental Hygiene & Dental Assisting		AEMT
Stanly CC	2	$524,300	Nursing		AEMT
Surry CC	2	$424,300	Nursing		AEMT
Tri-County CC	3	$924,300	Sonography, Cardiovascular	Nursing	AEMT
Vance-Granville	2	$900,000	Central Sterile Processing	Nursing	
Wake TCC	4	$1,424,300	Respiratory Therapy & Sonograph	EMS	AEMT
Wayne CC	2	$801,834	EMS	Nurse Aide	
Western Piedmont CC	3	$1,366,106	Dental Hygiene & Nursing	EMS	
Wilkes CC	1	$500,000	Dental Hygiene		
Wilson CC	3	$651,902	EMS (2)		AEMT
*NCCCS Administration		$100,000		*Advanced Emergency Medical Technician	
	161	$55 million			

Table 2: Allocations by Program Type

Program Type	College Count	Total Allocation	Start-Up		Expansion	
			College Count	Total Allocation	College Count	Total Allocation
Nursing - ADN and/or PN	32	$13,289,962	7	$3,500,000	25	$9,789,962
Emergency Medical Services	26	$10,571,564	4	$2,000,000	22	$8,571,564
Surgical Technology	9	$4,212,816	7	$3,500,000	2	$712,816
Dental Assisting	9	$3,934,390	7	$3,500,000	2	$434,390
Medical Sonography	6	$3,196,872	5	$2,750,000	1	$446,872
Respiratory Therapy	5	$2,127,386	3	$1,500,000	2	$627,386
Nurse Aide	6	$2,033,450			6	$2,033,450
Dental Hygiene	4	$2,000,000	4	$2,000,000		
Radiography	4	$1,800,000	2	$1,000,000	2	$800,000
Physical Therapy Assistant	3	$1,395,560	2	$1,000,000	1	$395,560
Massage Therapy	2	$1,000,000	2	$1,000,000		
Central Sterile Processing	2	$1,000,000	2	$1,000,000		
Medical Lab Technology	2	$1,000,000	2	$1,000,000		
Advanced EMT Accreditation	38	$923,400	38	$923,400		
Behavioral Health Programs *(Regional)*	1	$750,000	1	$750,000		
Sonograph, Cardiovascular	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Human Service Technology	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Veterinary Medical	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Mammography	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Sonography, Cardiovascular	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Cardiovascular Tech	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Radiographic Assistant	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Neurodiagnostic Technology	1	$500,000	1	$500,000		
Orthopedic Technician	1	$476,600	1	$476,600		
Computed Tomography & MRI	1	$400,000			1	$400,000
Nursing - ADN and/or PN/Others	1	$400,000			1	$400,000
Medical Assisting	1	$388,000			1	$388,000
NCCCS Administration		$100,000	1=	$100,000		
Grand Total	**161**	**$55,000,000**	**95**	**$30,000,000**	**66**	**$25,000,000**

Requirement #2: Use of Funds

High-Cost Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant – Key Highlights

The $55 million investment was guided by allowable expenditures, which included salaries for instructional and non-instructional staff, program equipment, curriculum development, accreditation costs, and faculty professional development. Together, these targeted investments strengthened instructional capacity, upgraded facilities and resources, and ensured long-term sustainability of programs.

1. **Instructional and Non-Instructional Salaries.** Hired new faculty and staff to expand instructional capacity, reduce student-to-faculty ratios, and improve student support services. Retained existing faculty and staff in critical areas, ensuring continuity of instruction and stability in program operations. Expanded advising, lab support, and clinical placement services to better serve students and employers.

2. **Program Equipment.** Invested in industry-standard equipment, including customized training vehicles, simulation labs, and advanced clinical tools, to ensure students are trained on the same technologies used in the field and established or upgraded healthcare labs across multiple campuses, expanding access to modern training environments.

3. **Curriculum Development.** Developed new courses and programs in emerging areas such as telehealth, healthcare informatics, and **geriatric** care. Updated existing curricula to align with national standards and stackable credential pathways, ensuring relevance to employer needs.

4. **Accreditation Costs.** Supported the accreditation and re-accreditation of programs, enabling continued student eligibility for licensure and **certification** exams. Reduced time-to-accreditation in several programs, accelerating program launches and student enrollment.

5. **Faculty Preparation and Professional Development. Provided** faculty and staff with opportunities to renew professional licenses, earn certifications, and complete training on new instructional methods. Strengthened teaching quality and innovation, **ensuring** students are prepared for evolving healthcare careers.

6. **Workforce Alignment.** Colleges designed programs to address acute shortages in Nursing, EMS, Radiology, and other critical fields. High employer engagement ensured that curricula aligned with real-world requirements.

7. **Access for Rural Counties**: A substantial portion of funding was directed toward rural and Tier 1 counties, improving access to healthcare training and addressing disparities in healthcare delivery.

8. **Innovative Instructional Approaches**: Short-term credentials, stackable credentials, and hybrid programs were implemented to attract diverse student populations, including high school students, and working adults.

9. **Employer Engagement**: Robust partnerships with healthcare providers, including clinical placements and apprenticeships, play a critical role in enhancing workforce readiness. Direct recruitment pathways and advisory boards further ensure ongoing alignment with industry demands, maintaining a responsive and well-prepared talent pipeline.

10. **Program Implementation**: Quarterly progress reports were required to help track milestones, measure enrollment, and assess partnerships.

Programs Funded – Key Drivers, Lessons Learned, and Best Practices

North Carolina's community colleges are responding to urgent healthcare workforce shortages by modernizing training, expanding access, and strengthening pipelines into high-demand clinical roles. With more than 3,500 new graduates projected, colleges are leveraging short-term credentials, immersive simulations, and employer-driven strategies to build a prepared and sustainable talent pipeline. The key findings below reflect the most effective approaches used across the state to recruit students, rapidly skill new workers, support career mobility, and align instruction with the needs of North Carolina's healthcare systems.

1. **Short-Term, Credential-Focused Training Expands Rapid Entry Into the Workforce**
   Colleges prioritized short, focused programs leading to industry-recognized credentials—especially in EMT, Surgical Tech, Dental Assisting, Central Sterile Processing, Nurse Aide, Behavioral Health Tech, and Medical Assisting—to provide working adults and career-changers fast, affordable entry into the healthcare field.

2. **Accelerated and Stackable Pathways Support Career Mobility**
   Bridge programs (e.g., NA-to-LPN, LPN-to-RN, Rad-to-CT/MRI) and stackable credentials allow learners to start with an entry-level role and advance to higher-wage opportunities without restarting their education.

3. **Flexible, Hybrid Delivery Models Improve Access and Reduce Barriers**
   Hybrid schedules, mobile training units, and expanded rural delivery helped remove geographic and time-based barriers, enabling more students to participate while balancing work and family responsibilities.

4. **Early Talent Pipelines through High School Partnerships Strengthen Workforce Supply**
   Dual enrollment pathways, aligned career tracks, and pre-apprenticeships exposed students to healthcare careers earlier, building interest and accelerating entry into postsecondary training.

5. **Simulation-Based Learning Improves Clinical Readiness and Confidence**
   Investments in high-fidelity simulation labs, VR tools, and mobile simulation units created safe, repeatable, real-world training environments that sharpen critical decision-making before clinical placement.

6. **Modern Technology and Instructional Equipment Align Training with Industry Standards**
   Colleges expanded diagnostic capabilities, telehealth integration, and lab modernization to ensure students train on the equipment and technology currently used by healthcare employers.

7. **Employer Engagement Drives Program Relevance and Job Placement**
   Through advisory boards, curriculum co-design, and hiring partnerships, employers shaped training content and established clearer, direct pathways from classroom to employment.

8. **Work-Based Learning Strengthens Job Readiness and Talent Pipelines**
   Clinical placements, internships, apprenticeships, and co-ops gave students hands-on experience with real patients and work environments, improving job readiness and strengthening recruitment pipelines.

9. **Recruitment, Outreach, and Student Supports Expand Participation and Diversity**
   Targeted outreach, scholarships, and community engagement successfully broadened participation, particularly among underrepresented groups, veterans, and adult learners.

10. **Faculty Development and Recruitment Remain Critical Capacity Priorities**
    Colleges invested in instructor training, adjunct recruitment, and flexible staffing models to ensure instructional quality and to address ongoing shortages of qualified healthcare faculty.

11. **Quality, Accreditation, and Compliance Safeguards Maintain Trust and Value**
    Programs maintained alignment with State Board approvals and accrediting agencies, ensuring instructional rigor and strengthening employer and student confidence in the credentials awarded.

12. **Strategic Partnerships Strengthen Sustainability and Regional Impact**
    Joint investments in simulation labs, scholarships, and regional collaborations with healthcare employers improved capacity, advanced innovation, and strengthened long-term workforce infrastructure.

Impact Summary

Collectively, these strategies are transforming North Carolina's healthcare talent pipeline by expanding training capacity, accelerating workforce entry, and improving clinical competency. Colleges are now better equipped to deliver high-quality, employer-aligned training that meets the needs of hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, and emergency services across the state. By leveraging technology, partnerships, and flexible training models, the state is developing a more diverse, job-ready workforce—one that will strengthen patient care, reduce staffing shortages, and support the long-term health and economic vitality of North Carolina's communities.

Investments in Equipment and Instructional Resources

To expand North Carolina's healthcare workforce pipeline, colleges used Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant funds to modernize classrooms, simulation labs, and clinical training environments. Because healthcare programs rely on highly specialized technology, **approximately 65% of all grant funds were invested in equipment and instructional materials**, allowing colleges to offer students realistic, hands-on training aligned to hospital, clinic, laboratory, dental, and emergency-care settings.

Equipment Investments

These purchases strengthened training capacity in five major areas:

1. Simulation and Emergency Response Training

Colleges invested in **high-fidelity patient simulators, mobile ambulance simulators, emergency response equipment, gurneys, defibrillators, cardiac monitor simulators, vital-sign monitors, and IV/IO training systems** to replicate real-world scenarios. These resources allow students—especially in nursing, EMS, and emergency care programs—to safely practice trauma response, patient assessment, medication administration, and advanced life-support procedures. The addition of simulation software with case-based scenarios expands faculty capacity to teach critical-thinking and decision-making skills needed in high-pressure environments.

2. Patient-Care and Clinical Skills Development

To reinforce core bedside and patient-care skills, colleges purchased **hospital beds, stretchers, phlebotomy kits, medication dispensing systems, and hands-on low and high fidelity manikins** for practicing everything from transfers and positioning to injections and specimen collection. These tools enable students to build confidence in patient safety, infection control, mobility support, and clinical communication—skills that directly translate to entry-level roles in hospitals, long-term care facilities, surgical centers, and home health environments.

3. Imaging, Diagnostics, and Laboratory Technology

Programs requiring technical knowledge of diagnostics and imaging were enhanced through acquisitions such as **ECG and Holter monitors, ultrasound systems, X-ray and radiography simulators, microscopes, electrophysiology systems, and vascular catheterization lab simulators**. These investments ensure that students in cardiovascular, medical laboratory, and imaging sciences can learn on the same technologies used by employers, strengthening their competence in monitoring heart activity, analyzing cellular samples, performing scans, and interpreting diagnostic results—core functions needed to support physicians and improve patient outcomes.

4. Surgical and Procedural Training Resources

To expand operating room and specialty-care workforce programs, colleges purchased **operating room simulators, surgical instrument sets, endoscopic simulators, and procedural training equipment**. These tools allow surgical technology students to practice sterile field setup, instrument handling, scope navigation, and procedural support in realistic environments. By training on modern equipment that mirrors hospital operating rooms, students are better prepared to assist surgeons, support minimally invasive procedures, and adhere to strict accreditation and patient safety standards from day one.

5. Dental and Specialized Healthcare Instruction

Finally, investments extended to specialized disciplines through **dental chairs, sterilization units, digital imaging systems, intraoral cameras, periodontal models, and interactive anatomical models**. These purchases strengthened dental assisting, dental hygiene, and other specialized healthcare pathways by allowing students to master chairside procedures, radiography, oral health education, sterilization processes, and anatomy. The equipment also supports patient-communication skills by enabling students to use imaging tools to explain diagnoses and treatments—an increasingly valuable employer expectation.

Overall Impact

Collectively, these investments modernized healthcare training statewide, expanded enrollment capacity, and strengthened the pipeline of work-ready graduates entering high-demand fields. By aligning instructional environments with current industry standards, the grant reduced onboarding and training time for employers while improving student confidence, competence, and employability.

Requirement #3 Program Evaluation – Measures of Success
Impact Stories – Program Profiles

Strengthening North Carolina's Nursing Workforce

Through a strategic statewide investment exceeding $32 million, North Carolina's Community College System has dramatically expanded capacity in nursing education, addressing the state's most urgent healthcare workforce need. The High-Cost Workforce Start-Up and Expansion initiative has supported new cohorts, innovative scheduling models, and modern simulation and training technologies to prepare nurses at every level of the care continuum.

Across the state, colleges have leveraged this funding to expand Nurse Aide (NA I), Practical Nursing (PN), Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) programs, creating a seamless career ladder that enables students to advance from entry-level certification to registered nursing licensure. Many colleges used funding to introduce evening and weekend cohorts, allowing working adults and caregivers to pursue nursing education while maintaining employment. This model has been especially successful in regions such as Halifax CC and Piedmont CC, where new flexible scheduling options have drawn strong interest and achieved exceptional completion and NCLEX pass rates

The impact of this investment extends far beyond enrollment. Colleges are using funds to modernize laboratories with high-fidelity simulators, virtual reality training platforms, and advanced patient monitoring systems, creating immersive learning environments that replicate real-world care settings. Halifax Community College became one of the first colleges in the state to integrate Elsevier's Virtual Reality Simulation Suite, transforming how students practice clinical judgment and patient care.

At Forsyth Technical Community College, curriculum redesign has reduced the LPN-to-RN transition program from three semesters to two, accelerating degree completion and increasing access for licensed practical nurses seeking advancement

Through expanded Nurse Aide and Practical Nursing pipelines, colleges such as Central Carolina CC and Edgecombe CC are addressing critical shortages at every level of the healthcare system. Students gain hands-on experience in long-term care, hospital, and community health settings, supported by partnerships with leading employers such as Novant Health, Atrium Health, Cone Health, Person Memorial Hospital, and UNC Health. These collaborations provide clinical placements, mentoring, and scholarship opportunities, ensuring that graduates are workforce-ready and immediately employable.

This coordinated investment has strengthened every tier of the nursing education continuum. By expanding clinical access, embracing innovative teaching models, and building robust partnerships with healthcare systems, North Carolina's community colleges are cultivating a stronger, more resilient nursing workforce to meet the needs of patients and communities statewide. Students consistently cite the accessibility, flexibility, and hands-on preparation made possible through these initiatives as life changing. Colleges are not only meeting workforce goals, but they are also transforming lives and communities.

Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) Accreditation

In North Carolina, education providers must be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (COAEMSP) to offer the Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) course.

COAEMSP is the accrediting body for EMS education programs, including AEMT courses, and its accreditation ensures that the program meets the necessary educational standards and prepares students for certification and licensure.

The North Carolina Office of Emergency Medical Services (NC OEMS), which oversees EMS training and certification in the state, recognizes COAEMSP accreditation for EMS education programs, including those offering the AEMT course. This accreditation is crucial for programs to be eligible to deliver the AEMT curriculum and for graduates to sit for the state certification exams.

This new accreditation requirement goes into effect July 1, 2026. As such, colleges currently approved to offer the course will no longer be allowed to offer the program unless they meet the new requirement.

Below is an overview of the accreditation process:

1. Self-Study Report: The program submits a comprehensive self-study report demonstrating how it meets accreditation standards.

2. Site Visit: A team from COAEMSP conducts a site visit to review the program and its facilities.

3. Accreditation Decision: Based on the findings, COAEMSP decides to grant accreditation, require additional information, or deny accreditation.

The funds allocated are being used to assist the college with the accreditation process. Funds are being used to pay the following expenses: Application fees, site visits, AEMT Conference, annual accreditation fees, and other related expenses to assist with the accreditation process, including staffing, instructional equipment, and curriculum development.

Besides meeting North Carolina's new requirement, below are some additional highlights as to why COAEMSP Accreditation matters:

- Accreditation Standards: COAEMSP sets the standards for EMS educational programs, ensuring they meet specific criteria related to the curriculum, faculty qualifications, administrative support, resources, and student outcomes.

- Programs Accredited: This includes paramedic programs and other allied health educational programs related to emergency medicine.

- Quality Assurance: Accreditation verifies that a program meets education quality standards, which is vital for student preparedness and safety in emergency medical situations.

- Eligibility for Certification: Graduating from an accredited program is often a requirement for students to sit for national certification exams, which are necessary for employment in many states.

- Continuous Improvement: Accredited programs are subject to regular reviews, prompting them to engage in continuous quality improvement and remain current with advancements in the field.

Advancing Oral Health Education and Access Across North Carolina

Through a strategic $12 million statewide investment, North Carolina's Community College System has transformed oral health education and workforce development across the state. The High-Cost Workforce Start-Up and Expansion initiative has enabled colleges to launch and expand dental assisting and dental hygiene programs, modernize equipment and facilities, and create clear career ladders that help working adults progress from entry-level credentials to advanced licensure.

This investment has strengthened the state's oral health pipeline through new and expanded programs that meet the growing demand for skilled professionals in both rural and urban areas. Community colleges have established innovative pathways that connect Dental Assisting (DA I/DA II) to Dental Hygiene programs, supporting adult learners who are balancing family, work, and education. Many programs now offer evening and flexible scheduling options, ensuring that working adults can advance their skills and earning potential without stepping away from the workforce.

The impact extends beyond education. These programs are improving community access to oral healthcare. Students are providing low-cost dental services to residents through on-campus clinics and local partnerships, including collaborations with the East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine, the NC Dental Society Foundation, and local public health agencies. These partnerships not only increase access to preventive and restorative care but also give students valuable clinical experience in real-world settings.

Success stories highlight the far-reaching benefits of this initiative. At Mayland Community College, students in the new Dental Assisting program are already working with local providers to deliver care to underserved patients and veterans. One student shared, "I wasn't sure where my path would lead, but now I'm helping people feel better about their smiles, and I've found a career I love." Across the state, graduates are finding employment immediately upon completing their programs, with many receiving job offers during clinical rotations.

Industry engagement has been essential to this success. Dental practices, regional hospitals, and public health clinics have served on advisory boards, offered clinical placements, and provided equipment and expertise to help shape training aligned with modern practice standards. These collaborations ensure that graduates are workforce-ready and that employers benefit from a steady supply of skilled dental professionals.

The collective outcome of this $12 million investment is a stronger, more accessible oral health workforce that not only meets regional employment needs but also enhances the well-being of North Carolina's communities. By linking education, service, and opportunity, the state's community colleges are building sustainable pathways that elevate both students and the health of the communities they serve.

Behavioral Health and Direct Care Workforce Pipeline Regional Initiative

North Carolina's behavioral health system is facing a critical workforce shortage, particularly in direct care and paraprofessional roles such as Peer Support Specialists (PSS), Direct Support Professionals (DSP), and Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT). To address this need, a statewide grant initiative—led by Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College in partnership with Forsyth Tech and Stanly CC—   has been launched to build a workforce pipeline across all 58 community colleges. This effort aims to expand access to training, credentialing, and career pathways in behavioral health, especially in rural and underserved regions of the state.

The project focuses on expanding Continuing Education (CE) course offerings aligned with curriculum programs, creating articulated pipelines, and engaging employers in co-designing programs that meet real workforce needs. Key activities include developing new courses, aligning training with credentialing and certification requirements, supporting apprenticeships in collaboration with ApprenticeNC, and building clear pathways between CE and credit-bearing programs. In doing so, the initiative not only supports economic mobility for students but also directly addresses the service access crisis in behavioral health care across North Carolina.

Project Accomplishments to Date:

1. Strategic Planning in Response to Legislative Change
The Initiative has taken proactive steps to respond to the recent expansion of the definition of a "Qualified Professional" (QP) by NCDHHS. The regional partnership is designing a stackable, apprenticeship-to-career model that allows students to begin supervised work experience while earning an associate degree in Social and Human Services. This AAS → QP pathway leverages recent policy changes that now allow individuals with an associate degree and two years of MH/DD/SAS experience to qualify as QPs—greatly expanding the pipeline of trained professionals in behavioral health. The planning is being conducted in partnership with the North Carolina Business Committee on Education (NCBCE).

2. Faculty Development & Statewide Collaboration
In March 2025, the grant supported a statewide faculty convening at Camp Caraway that brought together 25 faculty from across the state. This professional development effort focused on:
- Updates to the Qualified Professional role and legislative changes
- Planning for Advanced DSP workforce training
- Integration of Child Advocacy Studies (NC CAST)
- Working sessions to develop HSE courses for public safety fee waiver eligibility
- Design of a new Disaster Recovery Mental Health course
- Methods for tracking graduate employment in the behavioral health field

3. New Course Development Aligned to Workforce Needs
Two new courses have been fully developed, with subject matter experts compensated for their contributions:

- DDT 3110: Core Skills for Supporting Individuals with IDD
- DDT 3120: Advanced Skills for DSPs

Early outcomes show strong engagement and measurable impact. The course DDT-3110 enrolled 90 students across the three colleges, generating 16.875 FTE, and has become a cornerstone of North Carolina's behavioral health workforce strategy. Developed collaboratively with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Substance Use, and Developmental Disabilities (MHSUDD), this training was designed to ensure that direct care workers receive consistent, high-quality preparation across the state and provides frontline professionals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to effectively support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These results demonstrate the power of cross-agency collaboration to address workforce challenges. By linking educational design with statewide service priorities, the Behavioral Health Collaborative has not only expanded access to essential training but also strengthened the overall quality and consistency of care provided to vulnerable North Carolinians.

Impact Stories – College Profiles

College of the Albemarle– Dental Assisting

College of The Albemarle (COA) has long been committed to expanding access to high-quality healthcare education and strengthening the local workforce in Northeastern North Carolina. Support from the North Carolina Community College System's Start-Up Funding initiative has transformed that commitment into reality, allowing the college to launch a Dental Assisting program after more than 15 years of planning. The allocation provided the essential foundation needed to establish a new high-cost program in a region that previously had no local pathway for dental education.

A cornerstone outcome of the funding was the purchase of dental chairs, lab equipment, and simulation tools needed to deliver hands-on training that meets industry standards. These investments equipped students with the technical and professional skills necessary to thrive in dental settings and enabled the program to begin instruction even before permanent facilities were available. Through a strategic partnership with East Carolina University's (ECU) Dental Community Service Learning Center in Elizabeth City, COA's inaugural cohort trained in ECU's clinic space during evening hours, while a collaboration with Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) provided instructional guidance and mentorship as the program took shape.

The impact was immediate. COA's first dental assisting cohort launched in May 2024, enrolling 13 students who achieved 100% retention and program completion. With new equipment now installed on campus, the second cohort began in October 2024, fully enrolled with a waiting list already in place. For now, classes are held in temporary facilities within the Arts and Sciences Building until COA's new Health Sciences Building is completed in 2026.

Dean of Health Sciences and Wellness Robin Harris emphasized the transformative nature of the funding:

"The money was a huge help in us finally being able to start dental in our area after looking at it for over 15 years… we just didn't have the money to get any high-cost new programs going. This grant was the key to us moving forward."

This strategic use of start-up funds has not only expanded educational access but also created a sustainable pipeline of trained dental professionals for the region. Graduates will earn a Certificate in Dental Assisting I and are eligible to pursue Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) credentials, positioning them for immediate employment in local practices and clinics.

President Dr. Jack Bagwell underscored the broader workforce significance:

"This program represents a critical investment in the future of healthcare in our region. Equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge, we are not only meeting workforce demands but also empowering individuals to pursue rewarding careers in dental assisting."

The start-up investment in College of The Albemarle's Dental Assisting program demonstrates the power of targeted funding to remove barriers, accelerate implementation, and respond directly to workforce needs. By combining state support with regional collaboration and institutional determination, COA has established a thriving new program that is already producing results by expanding access, strengthening community partnerships, and transforming the future of dental care in Northeastern North Carolina.

Tri-County Community College-Cardiovascular Sonography

Tri-County Community College (T-CCC) is advancing healthcare workforce development in far western North Carolina through the establishment of a new Cardiovascular Sonography program, made possible by $500,000 in High-Cost Workforce Start-Up Funds from the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). This investment represents a major step toward addressing the region's shortage of trained cardiac imaging professionals and expanding access to specialized healthcare education in one of the state's most rural areas.

Initially envisioned as a post-certificate offering for General Medical Sonography graduates, the Cardiovascular Sonography program quickly evolved into a comprehensive two-year associate degree following strong community interest and consultation with local hospital partners. Feedback from healthcare employers, including Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital, Union General Hospital, Northside Hospital, CHI Memorial Hospitals, and Piedmont Healthcare, revealed that a full associate degree pathway would better meet workforce demands and provide students with direct entry into the field.

Start-up funds have been critical to the program's development and infrastructure. T-CCC has purchased more than $141,000 in equipment purchases, including a Philips Ultrasound Machine, a HeartWorks Simulator, and Philips Lumify handheld probes/ These state-of-the-art technologies will allow students to gain hands-on experience using the same advanced tools found in modern healthcare settings. These resources will support both classroom instruction and clinical simulation, allowing students to diagnose and navigate complex cardiac conditions safely before working with real patients.

To ensure long-term success, T-CCC hired a dedicated instructor who is leading curriculum development in collaboration with the General Sonography faculty and preparing for the program's accreditation process. The college is also organizing public information sessions to build awareness and recruit the first cohort of students, expected to begin in Fall 2026. Despite not yet being open to enrollment, the program already has seven students on its waitlist and has received more than 100 inquiries from prospective learners interested in pursuing this new opportunity.

The impact of this investment extends beyond the classroom. By developing a program that trains students locally in a high-demand, high-wage healthcare specialty, T-CCC is strengthening its region's healthcare infrastructure while providing life-changing career pathways for residents. The program will serve as a pipeline of skilled cardiovascular sonographers for area hospitals and clinics, improving access to diagnostic imaging and advancing patient care across Western North Carolina.

T-CCC President Donna Tipton-Rogers emphasized that this program represents both a workforce and community milestone:

""*The High-Cost Startup Grant has been instrumental in helping Tri-County Community College meet the critical workforce needs of our local healthcare industry. For years, our region has faced challenges in recruiting and retaining trained cardiovascular sonographers. This grant provided the essential resources to launch a highly specialized academic program, one that is both financially and administratively demanding, and, in doing so, has strengthened the long-term health outcomes of our entire region.*"

Through this targeted investment, Tri-County Community College is building the foundation for a sustainable, regionally responsive Cardiovascular Sonography program that will have lasting impact by expanding healthcare access, elevating training quality, and transforming lives in the communities it serves.

Wake Technical Community College – Respiratory Therapy Program

Wake Technical Community College's Respiratory Therapy (RT) program, supported through the High-Cost Workforce Start-Up Grant, represents a strategic investment in addressing North Carolina's growing demand for skilled respiratory therapists. This initiative strengthens North Carolina's healthcare workforce pipeline by preparing graduates for high-demand roles that support patient care, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's lasting impact on respiratory health.

Grant funds supported the purchase of advanced instructional equipment and the completion of accreditation milestones. The college acquired three high-fidelity simulation manikins, four ventilators, a BiPAP, a cough assist device, neonatal resuscitator, and five airway training manikins, along with circuits, filters, and suction catheters. This state-of-the-art laboratory replicates modern hospital environments, ensuring students receive real-world preparation.

The project directly benefits students by expanding enrollment capacity in a high-demand allied health field and providing access to modern, competency-based training environments. There are currently 14 students in the new cohort. Graduates will enter the workforce with the skills and confidence required to perform ventilator management, pulmonary diagnostics, and life-support interventions. The program aligns with Wake Tech's mission to prepare graduates for licensure and immediate employment in regional hospitals, long-term care facilities, and home health agencies.

Wake Tech has developed ten clinical partnerships across the Triangle region, with sites including UNC Rex, Duke Raleigh Wake Med, and anticipates adding two more. Each partner reports 15–30 respiratory therapy job openings over the next five years, underscoring sustained demand.

The Respiratory Therapy program expands Wake Tech's ability to meet healthcare employer needs, producing graduates ready for licensure and employment in hospitals, critical care, and home health settings. This start-up project exemplifies the System's commitment to aligning education with workforce demand, ensuring that Wake County and surrounding regions have the skilled professionals required to sustain quality respiratory care across North Carolina.

Richmond Community College – Surgical Technology Program

Richmond Community College launched its Surgical Technology program in August 2023 to address a critical and growing workforce shortage in operating rooms across the Sandhills region. The program prepares students for careers as surgical technicians, an occupation in high demand at local hospitals and surgical centers, with average wages reaching up to $35 per hour. After one year of study, graduates are eligible to sit for the Tech in Surgery TS-C (NCCT) certification exam, allowing them to enter the workforce quickly and meet urgent employer needs.

Since implementation, the program has achieved strong early outcomes. Richmond has successfully graduated 31 students in its first year and has expanded its clinical partnerships to two additional employer sites, increasing hands-on training capacity. The college has also made strategic investments in a second lab, outfitted with modern equipment, so students can build critical operating-room competencies before entering clinical rotations. These efforts have made Richmond's program a premier training pipeline for the region, demonstrated by a waitlist of 88 prospective students seeking entry.

Syerra F., a resident of Hamlet, N.C., she completed the Surgical Technology program in May, 2024. This career enabled her to replace a $16 per hour job as a receptionist with a $36 per hour weekend shift operating room surgical tech position at health provider First Health. The higher wage has allowed her to spend more time with her family. *"I was able to pull my youngest daughter, who will be three in a couple of months, out of daycare and now I get to spend Monday through Thursday at home with her and then I work Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so I get to spend more days at home with my children than I'm spending at work,"* .

Partnerships have been central to the program's success. Through the High-Cost Healthcare Grant, Richmond was able to expand enrollment and cover the cost of growth without burdening students. Local healthcare systems have not only opened their facilities for clinical rotations but have also donated supplies, supported incumbent worker training, and—in some cases—financially sponsored students to enter the field. Key partners include:

- FirstHealth of the Carolinas – Clinical rotation sites and donated supplies
- Scotland Memorial Hospital – Clinical rotation sites, donated supplies, and student sponsorship
- Pinehurst Surgical – Clinical rotation sites and donated supplies

These collaborations have strengthened the region's talent pipeline, improved access to high-quality training, and created direct employment pathways for students. In turn, employer partners are now working with the college to offer professional development for incumbent workers and priority training opportunities for Richmond students.

The Richmond Community College Surgical Technology program is a strong example of how targeted state investment—combined with employer partnership and educational innovation—can produce rapid, high-impact workforce results. With growing demand, strong outcomes, and deep industry alignment, the program is well-positioned to continue advancing the region's healthcare workforce needs.

Haywood Community College – EMS Program

Haywood Community College (HCC) has a longstanding commitment to preparing highly skilled emergency medical services (EMS) professionals who are equipped to respond effectively in life-saving situations. Support from the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges' High-Cost Healthcare Grant has recently accelerated this mission, allowing the college to expand its training capacity, deepen instructional quality, and strengthen service to Haywood County and surrounding communities.

A cornerstone outcome of the grant is the acquisition of a $400,000 state-of-the-art mobile simulation ambulance outfitted with advanced mannequins and emergency training equipment. These high-fidelity simulators replicate a wide range of medical emergencies—including stroke symptoms, compromised airways, trauma injuries, IV insertions, and more—within a realistic, confined environment that mirrors actual field conditions. This allows students to train under pressure, make rapid decisions, and gain experience in the same type of space, noise, movement, and urgency they will encounter in the field.

The mobility of the simulation unit has also expanded instructional reach and access. HCC can now transport hands-on training directly to all fourteen fire departments across Haywood County, ensuring that more students, regardless of location, can benefit from high-quality, scenario-based preparation. This alignment between training conditions and real-world expectations reduces transition time for new hires and supports stronger workforce readiness.

President Dr. Shelley White notes the significance of the investment:

"The High-Cost Healthcare grant has made a significant positive impact for our EMS program at Haywood. Having access to a state-of-the-art simulation-equipped ambulance allows our students to gain experience in the environment where they will be saving lives. This level of preparation is invaluable—many thanks to the State Board for prioritizing these grants."

In addition to improving instructional delivery, the grant has strengthened the college's operational capacity. Because the simulation equipment was funded through the High-Cost Healthcare initiative, HCC did not have to redirect limited institutional funds, allowing the college to maintain support for faculty, labs, and student services. The enhanced training environment is also expected to boost recruitment, retention, and job placement outcomes—further supporting the region's emergency response system and talent pipeline.

EMS Program Director Krystal Shuler affirmed the program-wide impact:

"The grant has supplied the program with the ability to elevate our program and equipment to better serve our partners through initial and continuing education classes."

The High-Cost Healthcare Grant has been transformative for Haywood Community College. Through modern simulation capabilities, expanded training access, and strengthened workforce alignment, the initiative is delivering benefits that extend far beyond campus by helping protect the health and safety of Haywood County residents and supporting the next generation of EMS professionals.

Martin Community College-Physical Therapist Assistant Program

Martin Community College received $395,560 in High-Cost Workforce Program Expansion Funds to strengthen its Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program and enhance opportunities for students to apply classroom learning in real-world clinical environments.

This investment allowed the college to transform its campus into a vibrant rehabilitation training center through the purchase of new wellness and therapeutic equipment, construction of a walking path, installation of outdoor exercise stations, and addition of a basketball court used for rehabilitation exercises and mobility assessments. These facilities create an on-campus wellness and rehab center, enabling PTA students to serve local seniors and community members who may not otherwise have access to therapy services.

Students now gain direct, hands-on experience providing patient care under faculty supervision, developing essential competencies in assessment, therapeutic exercise, gait training, and patient education. By working with real clients in this supportive environment, students also strengthen critical soft skills such as communication, empathy, and professionalism, qualities vital to effective patient outcomes.

The new space integrates learning with service, allowing students to bridge the gap between simulation and authentic clinical practice. It prepares them for success in clinical rotations and future employment while simultaneously fulfilling a vital community need. Residents benefit from improved mobility, wellness education, and access to physical therapy support close to home, while students experience the meaningful impact of their chosen profession firsthand.

Through this expansion, Martin Community College has created a model of experiential learning that promotes both student excellence and community well-being. This is a true partnership between education and service that embodies the college's mission to improve lives through learning.

Forsyth Technical Community College-Physical Therapist Assistant Program

Forsyth Technical Community College's Nursing Expansion Grant has significantly advanced the capacity of the Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) program by expanding the LPN-to-RN pathway to meet the critical demand for registered nurses across Forsyth and Stokes Counties.

This initiative directly addresses the regional workforce shortage identified by local healthcare employers, where high RN vacancy rates and turnover persist in both acute and long-term care settings. The grant funding targeted the growth of the LPN-to-RN pathway, a strategic response to employer feedback emphasizing the urgent need for advanced nursing credentials. By expanding access for licensed practical nurses (LPNs) to advance their education and obtain RN licensure, the project strengthened the nursing talent pipeline while enhancing career mobility for working healthcare professionals.

Funds were invested to expand instructional capacity, hire two full-time faculty and additional adjuncts, and enhance teaching and learning environments. The college also used the grant to provide faculty professional development in hybrid learning, simulation-based education, and evidence-based instructional practices. Investments in lab equipment, technology upgrades, and simulation resources are increasing instructional quality and expanding access through flexible, high-impact learning experiences. The expansion project resulted in increased enrollment capacity, additional access points, and new educational flexibility for working adults.

Forsyth Tech launched a new instructional site in Stokes County and implemented two admission cycles per year, creating four cohorts annually.

The college also developed an LPN-to-RN apprenticeship model, integrating education with hands-on employment to support student persistence and improve transition to the workforce. The addition of hybrid course delivery has made nursing education more attainable for adult learners, enabling them to advance professionally without pausing their careers.

Key partnerships with Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist, Novant Health, and regional long-term care providers have reinforced the initiative's workforce impact. These employers collaborated on curriculum alignment, provided clinical placements, and offered apprenticeship opportunities that give students real-world experience and direct hiring pipelines. The college also strengthened partnerships with local schools and career centers to promote dual-enrollment pathways into nursing for high school students. The Nursing Expansion Grant has already delivered measurable outcomes:

- o Annual enrollment capacity grew from 24 to 52 students, with the potential to reach 114 students per year.
- o The curriculum was streamlined to create a direct, uninterrupted pathway from Practical Nursing (PN) to ADN.
- o Hybrid delivery increased accessibility and retention for working adults.
- o Apprenticeship opportunities now link education and employment, reducing time-to-hire for local healthcare employers.

This project demonstrates how targeted investment and collaboration can transform nursing education capacity, accelerate student advancement, and strengthen the healthcare workforce pipeline across Forsyth and Stokes Counties.

Below is a statement from Dr. Janet Spriggs, President of Forsyth TCC:

> *This strategic expansion ensures that hospitals, clinics, and care facilities across our community remain well-staffed, resilient, and prepared to deliver the high-quality care our residents deserve.*

Brunswick Community College-Dental Assistant Program

Brunswick Community College long envisioned offering a Dental Assisting Program for local students but faced financial constraints that made it difficult to launch such an initiative. However, with the support of multiple grants from the NCCCS (High-Cost Start-Up & Expansion), the college was able to establish the Dental Assisting Program—an opportunity that would have otherwise been out of reach due to limited funding.

The program was specifically created to address the growing need for dental assistants in Brunswick County. Local dentists had been struggling to fill positions because of a shortage of qualified candidates. The program equips students with the necessary skills and certifications to immediately step into dental assisting roles upon graduation. Many students have even received job offers while completing their clinical internships, prior to finishing the program.

The curriculum covers a broad range of topics, including dental office procedures, patient care, dental anatomy, emergency response protocols, and infection control. Students also gain hands-on experience in a state-of-the-art lab, with internships at local dental practices forming a key component of their education. The program has expanded to include training on proprietary radiography technologies, ensuring students are well-versed in the latest industry tools and practices.

Dental assistant positions are in high demand, not only in Brunswick County but across the state. Thanks to the program, local dental offices have been able to hire more graduates, leading to shorter patient wait times and improved care. The program has become vital in meeting the region's dental health needs.

Local dentists have been strong supporters of the program, providing internships and valuable hands-on learning experiences for students. These partnerships have strengthened connections between the college and local dental practices, creating a steady pipeline of highly trained professionals for the area's dental community. Several local dentists serve on the program's advisory board, ensuring the curriculum remains aligned with the latest technological advancements and industry standards. As of January 2, 2025, the program has served 31 students and established 18 clinical internship locations.

The Brunswick Community College Dental Assisting Program is a prime example of how grant funding can transform educational opportunities, directly benefiting students and addressing critical community needs. The high demand for dental assistants has paved a direct path to employment for graduates, while local dental practices enjoy the benefits of a well-trained workforce.

The team at Brunswick Community College hopes that this brief summary sheds light on the profound impact that well-targeted grants can have in solving local employment shortages and providing students with valuable career opportunities.

Sustainability Initiative

With the grant's non-recurring funds winding down, sustaining these vital healthcare programs is essential to ensure continued access for students and a steady flow of skilled workers into North Carolina's healthcare sector. Uninterrupted program delivery directly impacts hospitals, clinics, and vulnerable communities—especially in rural and underserved areas.

The NCCCS System Office is leading a comprehensive sustainability strategy anchored in technical assistance, grant-writing capacity-building, and impact storytelling:

- Grant Development Support: We guide colleges in securing new funding by refining proposals, connecting requests to statewide workforce priorities, and emphasizing measurable impact. Staff are trained in 10 proven strategies that include using labor market data, demonstrating past successes, and spelling out program sustainability plans.

- Data-Driven Impact Storytelling: Colleges are equipped to communicate their return on investment through clear metrics—such as graduate placement rates and expanded seat counts—and by sharing real-life stories from students and employers illustrating program value and workforce needs.

- Resource Development: Our approach readies colleges to seek diverse funding streams (federal, state, private) and to develop implementation plans that ensure long-term success beyond the end of this grant.

Grant-Writing Guidance Highlights

1. Ground proposals in workforce data: Align expansion needs and requests with local and state labor market gaps.

2. Document "boots on the ground" needs: Identify faculty, facility, or clinical bottlenecks.

3. Integrate sustainability planning: Show how colleges and employers will support continued program operation.

4. Highlight measurable results: Provide outcome data and human-centered stories to demonstrate effectiveness.

Why This Initiative Is Critical

- Meeting ongoing healthcare workforce shortages requires sustained investment, strategic planning, and the ability to demonstrate and communicate program impact to future funders.

- The success of this initiative positions North Carolina as a leader in healthcare education, helping to ensure healthy communities and strong local economies for many years to come.

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See the next pages for an overview of our Sustainability strategy.

From Proposal to Sustainability:
Strengthening Healthcare Grant Applications

Preparing for Sustainability: Final Year Focus of the Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant

As the System Office enters the fourth and final year of the $55 million *Healthcare Start-Up and Expansion Grant*, our focus has shifted toward sustainability and long-term impact. The grant, established in response to critical workforce shortages across nursing, allied health, and behavioral health fields, has enabled community colleges statewide to launch or expand high-demand healthcare training programs rapidly. However, with non-recurring funding nearing its end, colleges must be equipped to continue building the healthcare workforce pipeline beyond the life of the grant.

To support this transition, the NC Community College System Office is implementing a statewide sustainability strategy focused on **capacity-building, storytelling, and resource development**. This includes:

- **Technical Assistance to Colleges:** We are providing targeted support to help colleges refine and align their proposals for additional funding sources, including federal, state, and private-sector grants. This technical assistance centers on 10 proven strategies that strengthen grant applications, from grounding proposals in labor market data to showcasing institutional track records and telling human-centered stories that convey real student and employer impact

- **Helping Colleges Tell Their "Impact Story":** To demonstrate return on investment to stakeholders and funders, we are helping colleges frame their healthcare expansion efforts around measurable outcomes, equity of access, and student/employer testimonials. These narratives not only highlight program effectiveness but also illustrate the urgent and ongoing need for a skilled healthcare workforce—especially in rural and underserved communities.

- **Grant-Writing Guidance and Toolkits (see attachment) :** Our technical assistance includes practical guidance on proposal development. Colleges are encouraged to:

    - Align funding requests with **statewide healthcare priorities** such as the **Propel NC funding model** and **First in Talent** goals.

    - Clearly articulate **local demand and workforce bottlenecks**, such as faculty shortages or lack of clinical slots.

    - Present detailed sustainability plans, including institutional commitments, employer co-investments, and post-grant resource strategies.

    - Use **metrics that matter**—like projected seat expansion, licensure pass rates, and graduate placement rates—to strengthen accountability and funding justification.

This final-year approach ensures that colleges are not only celebrating past accomplishments but also building a durable foundation for the future. Through this sustainability strategy, we are empowering colleges to keep training the next generation of healthcare workers and strengthening North Carolina's ability to meet urgent health care needs for years to come.

Attachment A:

Top 10 Trends in Grant Writing for Expanding an Existing Healthcare Program

#	Core Topics	Why It Matters	Discussion Questions
1.	Ground Proposals in Local Workforce Data	Expansion needs evidence that current demand exceeds current capacity.	○ What data shows we cannot meet current workforce demand? ○ How many qualified students were turned away? ○ What do employers say about current shortages?
2.	Document the "Boots on the Ground" Need	Shows funders exactly where bottlenecks exist (faculty, space, clinical slots).	○ What specific constraints limit our program today? ○ What resources are at capacity? ○ How do students and faculty describe these challenges?
3.	Link Requests to Statewide Priorities	Demonstrates alignment with NC health workforce initiatives (e.g., Propel NC).	○ `How does program expansion connect to statewide strategies? ○ What workforce sectors will this expansion support? ○ How will expanded seats reduce projected shortages?
4.	Build Sustainability Into the Expansion	Funders need to know expanded capacity won't vanish when the grant ends.	○ How will expanded seats be supported long-term? ○ What is the institution committing to sustain this growth? ○ Are employers willing to provide ongoing support?
5.	Showcase Past Accomplishments	Demonstrates that previous investments yielded results.	○ What were the results of prior grants or expansions? ○ How have past outcomes strengthened the workforce pipeline? ○ Can we highlight graduate or employer success stories?
6.	Highlight Access to Opportunities	Expansion should show how more students, especially underserved groups, will benefit.	○ Which students are waiting for seats (e.g., rural, Tier 1 counties)? ○ How will expansion address access gaps? ○ How can we measure equity improvements?
7.	Strengthen Employer Partnerships	Employers validate that expanded graduates will be hired.	○ Which employers are already hiring our graduates? ○ Can they provide letters of support or co-investments? ○ How does expansion reduce their workforce shortages?
8.	Use Metrics That Matter	Funders want to see measurable outcomes.	○ What expansion-specific metrics can we promise (new seats, reduced waitlists)? ○ What outcome measures will we report (pass rates, placements)? ○ How will these metrics be tracked?
9.	Tell a Human-Centered Story	Data must be paired with real student/employer experiences.	○ What student stories show the impact of unmet demand? ○ How do employer quotes highlight urgent workforce needs? ○ Can we frame expansion as "students waiting, employers waiting"?
10.	Plan for Implementation Realities	Expansion has risks (timelines, accreditation, faculty recruitment).	○ What implementation challenges did we face before? ○ What is realistic for hiring and equipment purchases? ○ How will we ensure new cohorts launch on time?

SBCC
11/21/2025

Top 10 Trends in Grant Writing for Starting a New Healthcare Program

#	Core Topics	Why It Matters	Discussion Questions
1.	**Ground Proposals in Local Workforce Data**	New programs must prove that demand exists and no current training meets it.	o What workforce gaps will this new program fill? o How do local employer data and labor market reports support the case? o What are the projected job openings in this field?
2.	**Document the "Boots on the Ground" Need**	Funders want to hear how the absence of this program impacts communities.	o What services are missing without this program? o How do employers describe the gap? o Are students traveling far away to get this training?
3.	**Link Requests to Statewide Priorities**	Justifies why a new program advances NC's workforce goals.	o Which state priorities call for this workforce? o How does this program complement existing programs nearby? o How does it align with Propel NC workforce sectors?
4.	**Build Sustainability Into the Launch**	Funders want assurance a new program will last.	o What's the plan to sustain faculty and labs after startup? o What institutional commitments guarantee long-term viability? o Are employers committing clinical sites or sponsorships?
5.	**Showcase Institutional Track Record**	With no past outcomes for the new program, show credibility by highlighting similar launches.	o What other new programs have we launched successfully? o What outcomes did those programs achieve? o Can we show a history of strong accreditation and licensure pass rates?
6.	**Highlight Equity and Access**	New programs should demonstrate how they expand geographic or demographic access.	o Is this the only program of its kind within the region? o How does this program serve Tier 1 or rural counties? o What new populations will gain access?
7.	**Strengthen Employer Partnerships**	For new programs, employer support must come early and often.	o Which employers will commit to hiring graduates? o Can they provide startup support (equipment, advisory roles, sites)? o How will they validate the need during accreditation?
8.	**Use Metrics That Matter**	New programs must project outcomes with clear benchmarks.	o How many students will be enrolled in the first 3 years? o What are projected pass rates and job placements? o What measurable outcomes can we guarantee? o
9.	**Tell a Human-Centered Story**	A compelling story makes the case for why this program should exist.	o Who is waiting for this training (students, employers)? o How will this program change access for local residents? o What local stories show the consequences of not having this program?
10.	**Plan for Implementation Realities**	Launching a new program requires more planning than expansion (labs, faculty, accreditation).	o What is the realistic timeline for accreditation and first cohorts? o What startup purchases are critical to launch? o How will we recruit faculty and secure clinical sites in time?