

The Most Important Job in North Carolina

Selecting the Next President/CEO of the NC Community College System

North Carolina leads the nation in business and economic growth. The North Carolina Community College System drives that success by developing the skilled workforce behind it.

The next President/CEO will lead this work, expanding opportunity for individuals and strengthening the state's economy.



Voices Across the State

“North Carolina’s business community doesn’t just benefit from a strong community college system – we depend on it. The talent pipeline that runs through our 58 community colleges allows companies to grow here, stay here, and keep choosing North Carolina when they have options everywhere else.”

– Gary Salamido, President and CEO, NC Chamber

“As a former president of the System, I know there is tremendous opportunity for a thoughtful, focused leader to harness our 58 extraordinary community colleges in a way that delivers for all North Carolinians.”

– Peter Hans, President, University of North Carolina System

“The next North Carolina community college system president will be assuming a critical role at a pivotal time. Our Great 58 community colleges have accomplished extraordinary things, student focused innovations are unfolding across the state, and the philanthropic community is invested at every level.”

– MC Belk Pilon, President and Board Chair, John M. Belk Endowment

“The next president of this System isn’t just leading an education organization. They are a key steward of North Carolina’s economic future.”

– Lee Lilley, Secretary of N.C. Department of Commerce

“The partnership between North Carolina’s public schools and our community colleges has been and continues to be a success, allowing many students to begin their journeys to college and careers before they even graduate from high school. When we do this work well together, students graduate from high school and arrive at community college with a direction, not just a diploma. The next President of our community colleges will be a critical partner to North Carolina public schools as they help students realize and deliver their futures.”

– Mo Green, NC Superintendent of Public Instruction



**SCAN QR CODE TO SEE MORE
OF WHAT LEADERS ARE SAYING**

An Inflection Point for North Carolina and the Country

The United States is entering a period of rapid economic and technological transformation. Industries are evolving faster than ever, and the skills required to succeed in today's labor market are shifting at unprecedented speed. For states that can adapt quickly, the opportunity is extraordinary. For those that cannot, the cost will be measured in lost competitiveness, stalled economic growth, and diminished opportunity for their citizens.

North Carolina stands at the center of this moment.

The state has built one of the most dynamic economies in the country, driven by advanced manufacturing, life sciences, financial services, logistics, and a rapidly growing technology sector. From global biotechnology firms clustered around Research Triangle Park to advanced manufacturing facilities across the Piedmont and growing fintech operations in Charlotte, industries across North Carolina are expanding and competing for skilled talent — and the nature of work within these industries is changing rapidly.

These shifts are placing new expectations on education systems. Students and families increasingly expect a clear return on their investment. Employers are seeking faster pathways to skilled talent and stronger alignment between education and workforce needs. Policymakers are demanding measurable outcomes and accountability for public investment. Across the nation, institutions responsible for preparing people for work are being asked to move faster, operate innovatively, and deliver results.

For North Carolina, meeting this moment is not optional. The state's long-term economic competitiveness depends on its ability to produce talent, expand opportunity for its citizens, and respond quickly to the needs of employers and communities. Few organizations are more central to that effort than the North Carolina Community College System.



"I spent years watching North Carolina compete for the world's business, and I watched our community colleges quietly be the reason we won — time and time again."

– Sharon Decker, former Secretary of N.C. Department of Commerce and Senior Advisor for Long-Term Recovery, Governor's Recovery Office for Western North Carolina

North Carolina's Most Important Organization

The North Carolina Community College System is the most consequential public enterprise in the state.

The System is North Carolina's most powerful force for expanding opportunity. It is where working adults find a path to better wages and a better life, and where individuals gain the skills to move into careers with real momentum. It provides affordable, practical pathways for recent high school graduates and for individuals determined to build a more stable future for themselves and their families. **By meeting students where they are and helping them move forward, the System changes lives while strengthening the workforce.**

— #1 —
state for business*

— #1 —
state for workforce**

58 colleges

630,000+ students

*Source: CNBC, 2025

**Source: 2026 Site Selection Magazine

With 58 colleges serving communities across the state, the System powers North Carolina's economy. The System provides **nearly half of all undergraduate education in the state**, reaching students at a scale unmatched by the university system. Enrollment has increased by 12% since 2019, four times the national average, with five consecutive years of sustained growth. At the same time, the System exceeds national benchmarks in student success, with a 49% six-year completion rate compared to 44% nationally.

Each year, more than one in 14 North Carolinians enroll to build the skills and credentials needed to enter the workforce or advance their careers. **At this scale, the System serves as the primary engine developing the workforce behind North Carolina's economic growth.**



Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute

631,826

2024-2025 TOTAL ENROLLMENT

CURRICULUM ONLY	BASIC SKILLS ONLY
293,843	51,202
CONTINUING EDUCATION ONLY	MULTIPLE PROGRAMS
255,655	31,126

OVERALL ENROLLMENT DISTRIBUTION BY AGE GROUP



+12%

 ENROLLMENT GROWTH SINCE FALL 2019
4X THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

+3%

 ENROLLMENT GROWTH FOR **FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS**

Leaders across government and industry recognize this impact. Sustained legislative investment reflects a strong and enduring public commitment to the System’s mission and confidence in its results.

Employers demonstrate that same confidence through deep and growing partnerships with the System. They collaborate to design training programs, align curricula with industry needs, and prepare students for careers

in advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, healthcare, logistics, and financial services.

These partnerships reflect a clear understanding among employers: **the System is North Carolina’s most important competitive advantage.**

Private and philanthropic partners have further strengthened the System’s impact, contributing more than \$55 million through a national campaign launched in 2025. These investments expand access to training, build workforce pathways, and help colleges respond quickly to emerging economic opportunities.

Together, this combination of statewide reach, strong public investment, and deep private-sector partnership makes the System a defining force in North Carolina’s continued growth. As industries expand and evolve, the ability to develop skilled talent remains the state’s greatest advantage. **The System builds that advantage every day.**

DELIVERING RESULTS

- 84%** labor market alignment
- 49%** postsecondary completion rate
(exceeding 2030 goal)
- 84%** first-year persistence rate
(top in the South)
- 36%** increase in certificate production
(2023-2024)

Source: MyFutureNC

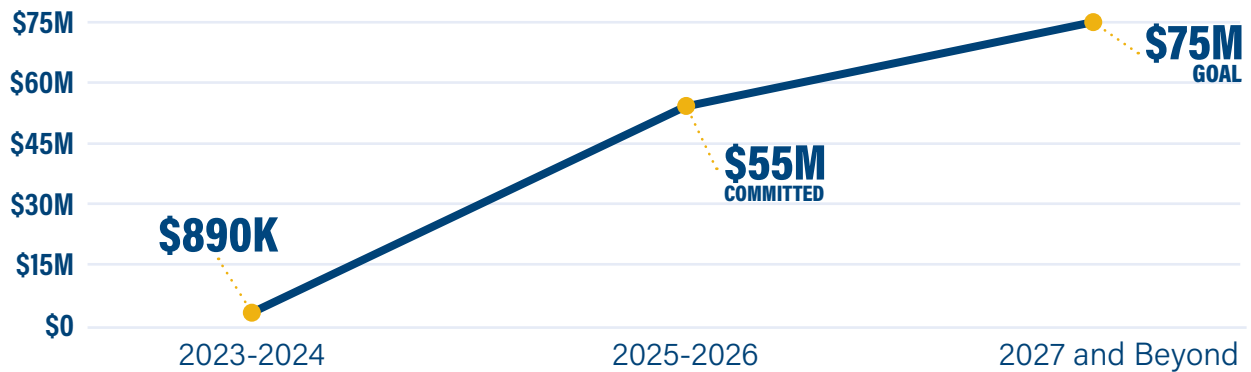
A System Backed by Strategic Investment



The North Carolina Community Colleges Foundation (Foundation) is a public charity and the official supporting organization for the System. The Foundation raises awareness and funds to advance the System’s mission, manages scholarship and award programs that honor excellence, and supports public-private partnerships that foster innovation. In the last three years, the Foundation has grown 50% and is well-positioned for greater impact. Together with the State Board and System Office, the Foundation is leading Soar: The Campaign for NC Community Colleges, a \$75 million multiyear venture to advance statewide priorities with national and multinational private funders.

Early momentum reflects strong confidence in the System’s model and its results. National and regional partners are investing to help North Carolina scale its workforce system, which already delivers impact statewide.

For the next President/CEO, this momentum creates a powerful platform. The role offers the opportunity to lead a system that is performing, attracting national attention, and positioned to grow even stronger.



A few of our strategic partners



Powering One of the Nation's Fastest-Growing Economies

North Carolina has built one of the most competitive economies in the country. The state continues to attract record levels of investment across advanced manufacturing, life sciences, clean energy, and technology, with companies choosing North Carolina for both its business climate and its ability to develop talent.

That growth depends on a steady pipeline of skilled workers.

The North Carolina Community College System builds that pipeline.

Recent announcements reflect the scale and pace of that growth:

TOYOTA
\$14B
CENTRAL NC
5,000+ Jobs
Manufacturing Facility

JETZERO
\$4.7B
PIEDMONT TRIAD
14,500+ Jobs
Manufacturing Facility

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS
More Than
23,000
JOBS
Through State Programs

HOME TO GLOBAL INDUSTRY LEADERS

North Carolina is home to a diverse group of Fortune 500 and global companies across key sectors. This concentration of industry creates sustained demand for skilled talent and reinforces the role of the System as the state's primary workforce engine.



"North Carolina's community colleges don't just fill today's open positions. They build the pipelines for jobs that don't yet exist, train the skilled tradespeople every industry depends on, and adapt faster than any other education sector when the economy shifts. That's not just a talent pipeline. That's a competitive advantage."

– Christopher Chung, Chief Executive Officer, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina



Craven Community College

This Leader's Charge

The next President/CEO of the North Carolina Community College System will step into a rare moment of momentum with a clear mandate to build on it.

Across the state, the System is expanding employer partnerships, strengthening pathways into high-demand fields, and improving outcomes for the students it serves. The work ahead is not to begin transformation, but to accelerate it.

This role carries a clear mandate: accelerate the System's impact on workforce and economic growth

Economic Development

The President/CEO will help position North Carolina as the top state for talent and workforce development. The System sits at the center of the state's economic strategy, connecting individuals to careers and helping employers build the skilled workforce they need to grow. The President/CEO must strengthen alignment between education and industry, ensure programs evolve with emerging sectors, and reinforce the System's role in driving economic competitiveness.

Workforce Development

The System has made significant progress in expanding pathways into high-demand careers. The next President/

CEO must scale what works, deepen employer partnerships, and improve outcomes across the student journey. This work requires a continued focus on credentials of value, faster pathways into the workforce, and clear connections between training and employment.

One System Leadership

Leading the System requires alignment across 58 colleges with diverse needs. The President/CEO must set clear direction, align strategy and resources, and ensure the System operates with focus and discipline. This includes strengthening accountability, supporting innovation, and enabling the System to respond to workforce needs at the speed of business.



Under Construction: Rendering of Future North Carolina Education Campus



Randolph Community College

Desired Attributes

The following characteristics reflect input from stakeholders across North Carolina, including trustees, college presidents, faculty, staff, students, employers, legislators, business leaders, and community partners.

The successful NCCCS President/CEO will:

- ✓ **Act with urgency and drive results.**
Set clear priorities, make decisions with confidence, and hold the System accountable for outcomes.
- ✓ **Build trust across sectors.**
Establish credibility with the Executive Branch, General Assembly, employers, college leaders, and education partners. Listen, engage, and lead with authenticity.
- ✓ **Decide with conviction.**
Navigate ambiguity, weigh trade-offs, and act on the best available evidence.

- ✓ **Lead with confidence and humility.**
Surround the organization with strong talent, listen actively, and bring out the best in others.
- ✓ **Think and lead at the enterprise level.**
Prioritize statewide outcomes, align strategy across 58 colleges, and reduce fragmentation while respecting local context.
- ✓ **Champion workforce outcomes.**
Focus on credentials of value, job placement, and wage outcomes. Align programs with high-demand careers and demonstrate return on investment.
- ✓ **Use data and technology to drive performance.**
Leverage modern systems and data to improve decision-making, accelerate outcomes, and support student success.
- ✓ **Communicate with clarity and purpose.**
Articulate vision, explain decisions, and represent the System effectively with policymakers, partners, and the public.

✓ **Navigate complex environments.**

Work effectively across government, education, and industry while advancing shared workforce and economic goals.

✓ **Build and lead high-performing teams.**

Create a culture of accountability, attract strong talent, and strengthen execution across the System.

✓ **Lead change with discipline.**

Drive measurable progress while modernizing programs, removing barriers, and scaling what works.

✓ **Represent the System with credibility.**

Serve as a visible, trusted leader and strengthen public confidence in the System's role as North Carolina's talent engine.



Who You Will Lead

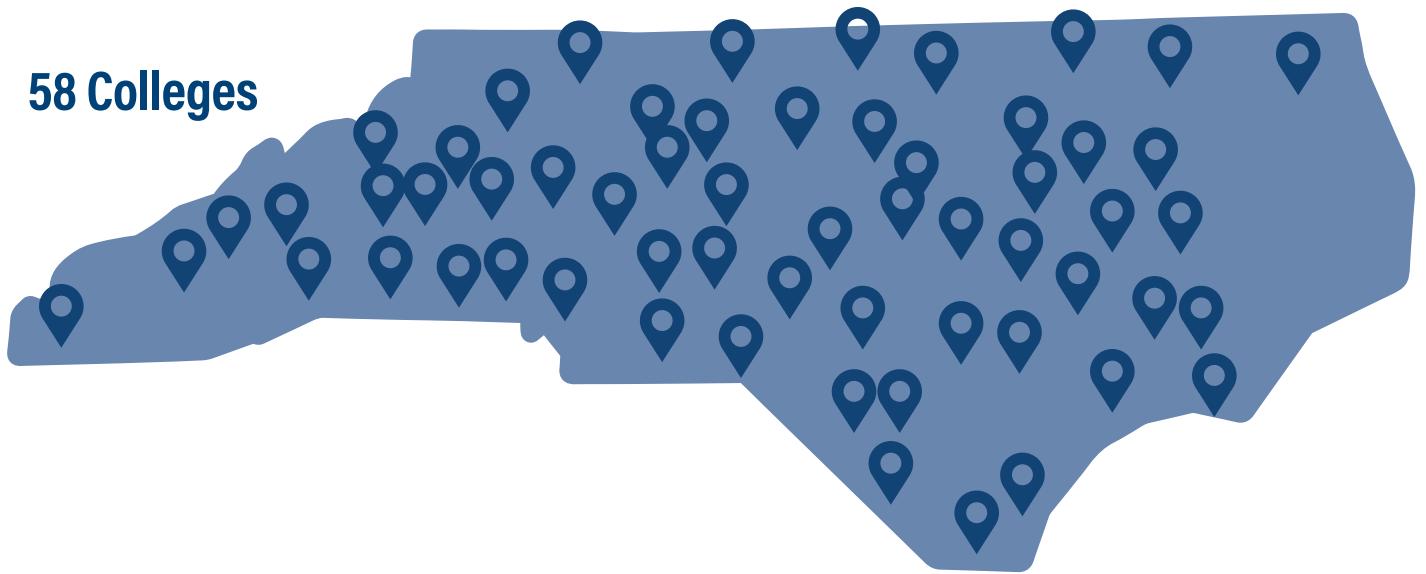
THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

\$3.17B Total system-wide operating budget across all 58 colleges

~\$1.8B In state aid allocated annually to 58 colleges through stable funding formula

\$335M budgeted tuition and fee receipts (2025-2026 fiscal year)

31,433 TOTAL EMPLOYEES SYSTEM-WIDE



THE SYSTEM OFFICE

\$40.7M
annual operating budget

\$30M
State

\$5.2M
Federal Grants

\$5.5M
Other

236 budgeted FTE (75 positions partially or fully grant-funded)

93% position fill rate
(2025-2026 fiscal year to date)



Dear Leader,

North Carolina's Community College System is at a defining moment, and we are looking for the leader who will shape what comes next.

Our 58 colleges serve more than 600,000 North Carolinians each year and power the workforce behind North Carolina's rise as the **No. 1 state for business three of the last four years.** Enrollment is growing four times the national rate yet demand for talent in high-wage sectors still exceeds supply. More than one million North Carolinians are within reach of a credential that could transform their lives and strengthen our economy.

This is not a traditional role.

This is enterprise transformation.

The foundation is being built with modernized systems, unified data, AI-enabled technology, and momentum is accelerating.

We are seeking a proven executive, regardless of industry who has led at scale, built high-performing teams, and delivered results with clear return on investment.

Someone who operates with urgency, uses data to drive decisions, and understands that students and employers must be treated as valued customers.

This is a platform to transform lives, strengthen the state, and build a national model for workforce development.

We are looking for a leader who will step up and make North Carolina the undisputed workforce leader in the country.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Looney

Thomas F. Looney

Board Chair

John Kane

John Kane

Vice Chair

Take Action

To make a nomination, provide a referral, or for additional information, please use the contact information below. While applications and nominations will be accepted until a successful candidate has been appointed, interested individuals are encouraged to submit their materials as soon as possible for full consideration as review of submitted materials will begin immediately.

TO APPLY

Please submit a resume and/or vita, cover letter, and any questions to:

- PresidentNCCCS@buffkinbaker.com
- **Ken Carrick, Partner** - 704-236-0659 | ken@buffkinbaker.com
- **Martin Baker, Managing Partner** - 770-313-5573 | martin@buffkinbaker.com
- **Janny DeLoache, Associate Partner** - 704-377-7828 | janny@buffkinbaker.com

NCCCS does not discriminate against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of race, color, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression/association, national origin, age, height, weight, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, or veteran's status, as defined by law, in employment, admissions, or educational programs and activities. Minorities, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply.



WHY RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Raleigh offers a rare combination of economic strength and quality of life. As the capital of North Carolina and part of the Research Triangle, it sits at the center of one of the country's fastest-growing regions.

Fast Facts

- **Top 10 fastest-growing** U.S. metro areas (*U.S. Census*)
- **Best City for Quality of Life** on the U.S. East Coast (*Travel & Leisure*)
- **#6 Best Place to Live in the U.S.** (*U.S. News & World Report, 2025-2026*)

Raleigh combines a strong and growing economy with a lifestyle that supports long-term success. The region continues to attract investment across technology, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing, while offering easy access to both the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Atlantic Coast. Residents benefit from vibrant communities, extensive outdoor amenities, and a nationally recognized food and arts scene.

Raleigh offers a place to make an impact and live well while doing it.

NC COMMUNITY
COLLEGES

CREATING SUCCESS