

Enhancing Career Awareness for Burke County Youth

FIND A FULFILLING CAREER IN BURKE COUNTY

A common misconception in many rural towns is that citizens must move away to urban areas to secure gainful employment and advance their careers. As a result, many young people all across North Carolina leave their hometowns

after high school in pursuit of what they perceive as better education, training, and employment opportunities. This pervasive trend of youth rural-urban migration limits the talent pool of qualified candidates for jobs in rural communities. Burke County particularly felt the burden of this trend in the 2010s when manufacturing companies – an industry which represents 30% of the local economy – experienced rapid retirement of their veteran workers and had trouble recruiting younger workers to fill open positions.

WORK IN BURKE

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Focuses on obtaining a postsecondary education, gaining marketable skills, and being lifelong learners in Burke County
- Started as a way for local manufacturers to attract new employees and prompted expansion to other industries
- Program has reached over 2,800 students, parents, community members, stakeholders and state representatives through 29 presentations
- Continuously promoted through seven ads and five editorials in the local newspaper, three ads per day on the local radio station, and distribution of thousands of promotional rack cards and decals

Acknowledging both the significance and magnitude of their workforce issue, manufacturers knew they could not solve it alone. Thus, they solicited assistance from their local economic developers, Burke Development, Inc. What started as an effort to augment manufacturing quickly expanded as it became apparent that the issue of attracting younger employees was not unique to manufacturing, but rather it was a widespread issue that spanned multiple industries within the county. Negative perceptions about the opportunities available in Burke County drove many youth to relocate, and left Burke County with fewer individuals available for existing positions in the manufacturing, furniture, and textile industries. A multi-pronged, collaborative, and long-term effort was necessary to change the narrative around success in the county, and Work in Burke was born.

Work in Burke is a joint initiative between local economic developers, public schools, community college, and employers to promote awareness of the diverse, dynamic, and rewarding career opportunities available in Burke County, and the training required to pursue a career in those fields. This effort is dedicated to helping middle and high school students make informed career decisions while remaining Burke County residents. Burke Development, Inc., in cooperation with its partners, launched Work in Burke in 2017 after interviewing and surveying over 300 parents, students, employers, and citizens. The survey revealed an overall negative perception of the local job market. To parents, students, and citizens, there was a lack of good jobs in the

area. Additionally, manufacturing was an undesirable career choice because of safety and cleanliness concerns. To address these issues, the initiative is developing videos about local career opportunities and taking photos that highlight local professionals with worthwhile careers. The campaign shares content via social media, direct mail, paid ads, presentations, and grassroots events.

The ultimate goal of Work in Burke is to change the narrative about education and workforce success; students can earn marketable credentials and achieve fulfilling careers in their home county, and they do not have to move away to be successful. The stakeholders involved with creating Work in Burke aspire to change both attitudes and behavior, and they understand that moving the needle on both of these metrics takes time. Subsequently, they conceptualized this initiative as a long-term effort over the next five to ten years. To measure their short-term success between 2018 and 2020, Work in Burke set outcomes focused on changing perceptions and postsecondary attendance. By 2020, Work in Burke aspires to see a 15% decrease in negative perceptions of local job opportunities and a 15-20% increase in Burke County high school graduates who pursue postsecondary education. Initial baseline surveys were administered in the fall of 2017 with all 6th through 12th graders in the county. Follow-up surveys for 12th graders were conducted in May 2018, and a follow-up survey will be conducted in the fall of 2018 for the remaining students.

PARTNERSHIPS

The current Work in Burke partners are:



**WESTERN PIEDMONT
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**



**BURKE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



BURKE DEVELOPMENT, INC.



**WESTERN PIEDMONT
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

NCWorks

NCWORKS



**BURKE COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**



12+ BURKE COUNTY EMPLOYERS

WORK IN BURKE CONSISTS OF VARIOUS ACTIVITIES INCLUDING:

Creating content about local careers such as photos, success story videos, interview-style videos, printed collateral and the website.

Mass communication about the initiative such as social media, paid ads, articles/editorials, direct mail, texting service/alert now, and newsletters.

Mentoring and engagement to develop community capacity such as expanding the Students Taking a Renewed Interest in the Value of Education (STRIVE) mentorship program, awarding teacher grants, delivering community presentations, and organizing grassroots events.

The Work in Burke Partner Program which provides career exposure to youth through tours, internships, job/career fairs, lunch & learns, speaking engagements, and Advanced Manufacturing Day.

Evaluation of initiative components through surveys of public school students and benchmarking of the program's reach.

PROGRAM FUNDING

Work in Burke is made possible by generous financial support from state and local partners. The initiative began with a two-year budget of \$300,000. This budget consisted of a salary of Work in Burke Director (28%), content creation (32%), information sharing (24%), workplace experiences (14%), and evaluation (2%). Work in Burke is supported by the following funding streams:

- N.C. General Assembly - \$180,000
- N.C. Department of Commerce Maximize Carolina Sector Grant - \$63,750
- ARC Grant - \$24,500
- Burke Development Inc. - \$30,000
- Burke County Public Schools and Western Piedmont Community College have also significantly contributed to Work in Burke through in-kind donations

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

From 2017 - 2018, the Work in Burke accomplished several outcomes, including launching their website, distributing mass communication messages, facilitating live presentations, and awarding grants. Notable accomplishments include:

- Created ten lifestyle and career story videos. Each video has an average of 1,500 views.
- Expanded the STRIVE mentorship program from one high school to three high schools
- Awarded two teacher grants (\$1,000 total)
- Program staff also frequently hear personal stories about how youth and parents are more aware of career opportunities in Burke County.

A May 2018 Work in Burke survey of high school seniors found that the program continues to yield promising results:

- 33% of seniors agreed that information obtained from Work in Burke made them more likely to stay in the area after they graduated high school.

ABOUT THE SERIES

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

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