

Feedback from Presidents and Trustees at Regional Listening Sessions – Updated

(Includes input from all eight listening sessions, including the final meeting held 2/14/22)

Background

Beginning with the State Board Planning Meeting in September, staff have been collecting input from key stakeholders as a part of developing the next System strategic plan. In order for staff and State Board members to gain a better understanding of community colleges' challenges and solutions, the System Office worked with community colleges to set up eight regional meetings between December 8, 2021 and February 14, 2022. The meetings were organized by Community College Trustee Region and were also configured so they would reach into the state's eight Prosperity Zones. Due to the rapid rise in COVID cases since early December, seven of the meetings were shifted to virtual format.

The eight meetings are shown below:

Meeting Date	Community College Trustee Region	Host College/Location	Participating Colleges
1/8/2021	Region 6 – Northeastern NC	Pitt Community College Winterville	Beaufort Co. Community College College of the Albemarle Edgecombe Community College Martin Community College Nash Community College Pitt Community College Roanoke-Chowan Comm. College
1/5/2022	Region 1 -- Southwestern NC	Southwestern Community College -- Virtual	A-B Tech (Asheville-Buncombe) Blue Ridge Community College Cleveland Community College Isothermal Community College McDowell Tech Southwestern Community College
1/6/2022	Region 2 – Northwestern NC	Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute – Virtual	Caldwell (CC&TI) Catawba Valley Community College Mitchell Community College Rowan-Cabarrus Community College Surry Community College Western Piedmont Comm. College Wilkes Community College
1/13/2022	Region 4 (part) -- Southern/SW NC	Central Piedmont Community College – Virtual	Central Piedmont Comm. College Gaston College* Montgomery Community College Wilson Community College*
1/14/2022	Region 4 (part) – Southern	Robeson Community College – Virtual	Bladen Community College* Fayetteville Tech Richmond Community College Robeson Community College Sandhills Community College Southeastern Community College*

Meeting Date	Community College Trustee Region	Host College/Location	Participating Colleges
2/1/2022	Region 5 – Southeastern NC	Coastal Carolina Community College – Virtual	Brunswick Community College Cape Fear Community College Carteret Community College Coastal Carolina Community College Craven Community College James Sprunt Community College Sampson Community College Wayne Community College
2/3/2022	Region 3 (part) – Piedmont Triad/ Central NC	Davidson-Davie Community College – Virtual	Alamance Community College Davidson-Davie Community College Forsyth Tech Guilford Tech Randolph Community College Rockingham Community College Stanly Community College*
2/14/2022	Region 3 (part)	Wake Tech – Virtual	Central Carolina Community College Durham Tech Lenoir Community College* Piedmont Community College Vance-Granville Community College Wake Tech

*From a different community college region

Some colleges participated in a meeting of colleges from outside their trustee region due to time availability or other coordination issues. Each college was invited to bring a team of five including the college president, chair and vice-chair of each college’s board of trustees, and additional trustees or staff.

Major Points Raised by Colleges

The information listed below was provided by college leaders who communicated the following needs and requests. These requests are provided as they were presented by community college presidents, trustees, or other college leaders in the listening sessions. **These comments due not necessarily represent consensus among colleges and have not been compared for alignment with the applicable state and federal law, and/or State Board Code.**

Italicized questions to follow are the questions posed in the meeting, and the text or tables below summarize responses.

What is the biggest challenge facing your college right now?

Some colleges mentioned one challenge, some listed more. Themes raised in college responses are listed below, with “Y” for each Trustee Region meeting at which the response came up and a “#1” to indicate the challenge that was raised by the most colleges at the regional meeting.

Major Challenges Cited	Trustee Region*							
	1 SW	2 NW	3a* Triad/ C~	3b* Tri- angle C~	4a* S/ SW~	4b* S~	5 (SE)	6 (NE)
Recruitment/retention of community college faculty/staff – with focus on pay or overall benefits	#1	#1	#1	#1		Y	#1	#1
Enrollment	Y	Y	Y	Y	#1	Y	Y	Y
Funding – overall level	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
Funding formula or funding priorities	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Workforce development/ fulfilling employer pipeline needs (including filling the pipeline, various CE/CU issues , data sharing to understand employment outcomes, etc.)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	#1	Y	
Call for greater focus on adult learners (some considering this the original mission of the NCCCS)	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
CCP issues , such as financial dependence on CCP, difficulty of converting dually enrolled into further community college enrollment, or low enrollment of students of color	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Other K-12 partnership issues -including data sharing to understand the future education and workforce pipeline	Y				Y	Y	Y	
Challenges re: responsiveness to students' needs: -free tuition or lower fees -comprehensive financial support/other support -flexibility with timing, length of terms, or location of education/training -mental health support	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Changing student population (in terms of demographics, pandemic learning loss, students with disabilities or mental health challenges, more part-time students)		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Disengaged (prospective) students and/or disaffected youth (including the increase in disengagement during the pandemic and understanding this group)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	
Technology or cybersecurity	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Capital funding for facilities	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Pandemic (direct discussion)	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	
Interest in statewide marketing/message , and/or greater engagement of colleges in marketing	Y	Y		Y (msg)	Y		Y	
Need to address barriers/increase flexibility	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	

*Regions 3 and 4 were each split into two meetings to reach additional Prosperity Zones.

~Attended by at least one college from outside the Community College Trustee Region

What is one solution you want to highlight that is helping address a critical issue in your community or region?

The table below lists many of the solutions collected thus far, with one more Regional Listening Session planned. The college teams mentioned solutions ranging from strategically designed workforce training and apprenticeship programs to partnerships with community organizations or other educational institutions. Other solutions addressed college capacity issues or student support strategies.

Sample Community College Solutions

Current Solution	College
College Capacity	
Improved board diversity through board letter to appointing authorities requesting that board appointments represent the community	College of the Albemarle (COA)
Building up grant writing capacity to address licensing fees for software, program startup costs, childcare/transportation	Edgecombe Community College
Recruitment and retention of IT staff via signing bonuses, piloting of working from home	Guilford Tech
New strategic plans, new directions	Mitchell Community College; WPCC
Various strategies to understand and address employee needs creatively, ranging from conducting a salary/equity study to allowing more teleworking/requiring fewer hours on campus to considering pet insurance for employees.	Piedmont Community College
Quarter-cent sales tax approved by county commissioners in 2018, with all funding dedicated to the college	Rockingham Community College
Using HyFlex program modality as a way to provide a more personalized education for students and meet their needs better	South Piedmont Community College
Moved to a One College model. Also government partnership/support for an entrepreneurship center and a STEM building and renovations.	Southeastern Community College
Developing an area off-campus (Lee Technology Center) with buildings for technology, HVAC, and small business encircling an Early College High School	Wilson Community College
Partnerships	
Model partnerships, including with Carteret hospital to grow their own nurses. Partnerships with school systems, businesses, hospitals crucial.	Carteret Community College
Engaging community champions to promote community college, including faith-based organizations, Sanford City Council member, Boys and Girls Club	Central Carolina Community College
Powers Promise and community partnerships with the McNair Foundation , county school systems, and Homeschool Association	Isothermal Community College
Strategic alignment of its new strategic plan with area economic development, the school system, and other local partners	McDowell Tech
Partnership with community, including work with the public schools, business, and the county to develop a shared vocational center	Montgomery Community College
Nonprofit collaboration: Strategic Twin Cities Ed. Partnership (STEP) --career exposure for K-12 students; Peacemakers -- underserved adults	Nash Community College
Partnerships—with other CCs (e.g., RAMP East certificate for advanced manufacturing) and community (reentry for justice-involved students)	Pitt Community College

Current Solution	College
Rowan Education Collaborative /biweekly meetings with college, school, county leaders; NC Manufacturing Institute employer-paid training	Rowan-Cabarrus Community College
Outreach to students , the community, employers—hotspots/laptops for students, outreach via health clinics , Harrah's Casinos partnership	Southwestern Community College
Paid internships and instructional programming , funded by two county commissions, involving four school systems in Surry, Yadkin counties	Surry Community College
-Partnership with Smithfield Foods (Industrial Systems) has been replicated in five states and at the college with swine management. -Working on partnership with a high school for HVAC, putting HVAC equipment at school, with the school allowing WCC to train on weekends.	Wayne Community College
Student Access, Support and Success	
Enrollment increases in recent semesters with the help of pandemic scholarship funding for all high school graduates (Longleaf Commitment + other funds) and multi-model learning opportunities (flexible in-person or online learning)	Forsyth Tech
Engaged Dogwood Health Trust to work with students so they wouldn't be deregistered due to inability to pay bills	A-B Tech
Adult learner work (highlighted at 12/2021 SBCC Issues Luncheon) including free college, Success Coaches	Blue Ridge Community College
Agreement with Duplin County Transit provides free transportation for students	James Sprunt Community College
Extensive student support: Single Stop referrals to community services; mental health first aid team; Student Assistance Program (SAP, similar to EAPs); Success Coaches, Career Coaches, and a health coach.	Randolph Community College
Progress on WCC plan's aim to increase the graduation rate; launched their Promise program ; revamping advising; Success Coach in each h.s.	Wilkes Community College
Workforce Development	
Career Accelerator Program – High school to community college pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship program	Alamance Community College
Career pathways to grow the workforce/retain local talent. Also (pre)apprenticeships with businesses, 4 school systems/14 high schools.	Beaufort Co. Community College
Partnerships with business stakeholders (listening to needs/having them be part of the solutions, and cultivating hiring from the college)	Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI)
Shifting of workforce training into academies, starting with the Furniture Academy; now also manufacturing , construction , hospitality	Catawba Valley Community College
Short term training programs (particularly academies) introduced in recent years – electric lineman , others	Cleveland Community College
Greater use of short courses to meet needs of employers and their need for initial training for new workers and more regular upskilling of workers	Durham Tech
Building of Fiber Innovation Center , a world-class facility to develop and test fibers (such as PPE) for industry. 2-yr. degree developed with NCSU.	Gaston College
Expanding short-term workforce training , in partnership with trustees, county commissioners, employers	Haywood Community College
Making use of teacher preparation programming to homegrow their supply of teachers at a time when school systems are losing teachers	Lenoir Community College

Current Solution	College
Career in a Year program, marketing all education offerings <=12 mos. (CE/CU) together. Also regional CC collaboration such as 1+1 programs.	Martin Community College
Strong growth in its apprenticeship program (Apprenticeship Iredell)	Mitchell Community College
Developing Continuing Ed. programs that have value to employers (such as pharmacy tech and electric line worker) and are cohort based.	Richmond Community College
Short-term industry training and apprenticeships , including several apprenticeship programs developing in healthcare	Roanoke-Chowan Community College
Top-tier truck driver training program, with strong collaboration with local industry (which donates trucks to the college).	Sampson Community College
PACE Apprenticeship program; building a Construction Trades Solutions Center . Also cites partnerships with CCs.	Western Piedmont Community College

Web links added by staff for illustration

What can the State Board and System Office do to better support your students and institutions?

College leaders communicated the following needs and requests:

- **Help community colleges attract/retain/support excellent faculty and staff**
 - Continue to advocate for (significantly) increased salaries for both faculty and staff. Pursue the new three-year legislative agenda aggressively.
 - Don't let General Assembly distinguish between faculty and staff—both groups are critical and need to be paid better
 - Engage business to tell their story and how community college funding is needed to meet their needs
(See this and other strategies in separate advocacy section, below)
 - Engage the Trustees' Association, Presidents' Association, community college family
 - Influence where possible about benefits as well (holidays, etc.)
 - Increase flexibility with local salary determination
 - Advocate for program funding that can pay more for special expertise
 - Explore hub and spoke model of program offerings that does not require each college to separately provide all program staffing
 - Provide professional development (e.g., re: online learning) – staffing and training capacity of colleges varies
- **Seek increases in funding and increased college budget flexibility**
 - Advocate for overall increased funding (an equitable allocation of education funding)
 - Advocate for specific needs – various priorities cited:
 - Funding for equipment and technology
 - Funding for program startup costs – and not limited to certain industries/occupations
 - Increased funding for infrastructure (e.g., via SCIF)

- Provide more funding for early alert services, virtual student support services
 - Address/help achieve free tuition and/or fees
 - Or one alternative view on fees: allow for increased fees or other funding streams for more stable local budgets
 - Some presidents seek NCCCS stance or support on concept of free college
 - One president: replicate TN's success with free college and free training – seek funding to continue/expand Longleaf Commitment and introduce statewide program for adult learners
 - Help colleges contain costs and seek grant funding
 - Consider a new role in Foundation fundraising
 - Be ready for need for fast program growth with new/expanding industry
 - Watch out for funding declines when pandemic funding disappears
 - Watch out for CCP policy changes that could undermine participation and funding
- **Examine and address funding model or funding priorities**
 - FTE funding formula (calculating funding based on previous year/s FTE) can hold back growth (program startup is difficult, slow); funding amount does not cover instruction and equipment costs of high-cost/high-demand programs
 - One recommendation: ultimately pay for outcomes; in shorter-term, move to 3-year moving average to temper budget impact due to a drop in enrollment
 - Support high-cost, high-demand programs with a higher level of funding (some programs operate at a loss)
 - Provide more funding for short-term workforce programs and programs leading to employer-valued credentials
 - Create investment pools with public and private dollars to help us realize our goals
 - Take into consideration the cost and burden of implementing new initiatives (especially hard on rural/small colleges)
 - Recognize that urban/larger community colleges have access to funding sources that small rural colleges don't (such as multi-campus funding and generally more support from county commissioners based on larger tax bases)
 - Reversion process needs to be revised so it doesn't incentivize spend-down of funding and allows saving of funds for good purposes
- **Enhance overall advocacy**
 - Legislative agenda is good/ambitious – get it to the General Assembly and focus on it to get it across the finish line
 - Increase number of lobbyists
 - Bring on an ambassador or lobbyist for each region
 - Get businesses to tell our story for us and engage in advocacy on our behalf in the General Assembly
 - Continue to lobby to improve RDS and the application process
 - Seek support for broadband in rural areas
 - Allow undocumented individuals to receive in-state tuition
 - Watch legislative action/study bills related to K-12 and support continued funding for K-12 schools for Career and College Promise (dual enrollment) students
 - We need a strategic plan to work with the legislature

- Need to make sure the legislature knows the depth of our talent in community colleges and the depth of their opportunities elsewhere (which is often greater than for university employees)
- **Support increases in enrollment through research, marketing, partnerships, processes:**
 - Research the causes of enrollment declines and possible solutions
 - Restart/reinvigorate statewide marketing campaign
 - More popular idea with smaller, rural colleges
 - Others may be more interested if individual colleges are engaged before marketing occurs and marketing aligns with their efforts
 - Define and promote the value of community colleges with business
 - Address the stigma of community colleges and share the jobs and pay that students can obtain as result
 - Create/expand intentional partnerships with K-12 education
 - Pursue data sharing at a statewide level (e.g., with K-12 partners) to understand the student pipeline
 - Align calendars of public schools with community colleges (one president)
 - Put more emphasis on community college courses vs. AP courses
 - Revise application/admissions/enrollment process
 - Review/revise or eliminate unnecessary questions in the application (e.g., education level of your father)
 - Enable CCP (dual enrollment) students to automatically be accepted as in-state students, without having to go through RDS (Residency Determination Service)
 - Make it possible for students to enroll and get schedules quickly. Make the experience more like Amazon (easy, quick).
 - Alternative view: add questions to the application so colleges know needs better/can serve more effectively
- **Clear away barriers that are part of State Board Code/any policy we have control over; advocate with SACSCOC as well as General Assembly**
 - Make it easier to use shorter/flexible-length terms
 - Create efficiencies in program approval process so there can be faster approval for quickly growing fields in an area
 - Pursue waiver option to make it easier for students to participate in CCP if not considered “academically gifted”; increase the number of pathways
 - Move toward more local autonomy on fee setting
 - Recognize that some SACS requirements (such as 18 graduate hours in a certain area) make it hard to recruit
 - Review athletics requirements – harder to do athletics in NC than in other states, and it can help with recruitment/enrollment
 - Review rules, requirements in partnership with college presidents to see which no longer serve a purpose (many antiquated)
 - Eliminate bureaucracy and jumping through hoops
- **Promote regional collaboration and innovation**
 - Provide incentives or flexibility for regional collaboration:
 - Allow flexibility of funding across service areas

- Help us create stronger business connections regionally and stronger partnerships
 - Support “hub and spoke” arrangements in which a lead college partners with other colleges for broader delivery of curricula.
 - Pursue economies of scale (regional and state levels), including leveraging systemwide buying power to help colleges band together to access lower-cost purchases for technology and data, such as learning management systems (LMS), customer relations management (CRM) systems, or economic data packages
 - One college asked the State Board to keep program offerings (in a region) limited so the System has fewer great programs rather than many mediocre programs
 - Promote and reward innovation, starting with federal pandemic funding
 - Recognize that a heavy focus on compliance can reduce innovation and create a “fear factor”
 - Seek regional collaboration rather than consolidation
 - Keep the System decentralized and retain flexibility gains
 - Research best practices in other states
 - Research and tap emerging industries
- **Convene colleges for problem solving and build System-wide partnerships**
 - Tap our own colleges for issue identification and solutions to vexing System issues, such as redefining the value proposition of community college
 - Create a feedback loop for program or pilot implementation so colleges and their faculty/staff can provide input and help revise strategies based on implementation
 - Build partnerships with key stakeholders (e.g., the business community) and connect stakeholders to colleges
- **Clear away obstacles to coming to campus and being able to focus on education – food, transportation, child care; counseling, etc.**
 - Different strategies raised include more of a role for community colleges or more partnering with nonprofit/community partners
 - Recognize that part-time students require at least as much support as full-time students
- **Prepare for changing demographics and increase in challenges facing students**
 - Address the effects of pandemic learning losses
 - Need to redefine “college readiness”
 - Measure the current skills of those affected by the pandemic and ramp up compensatory/remedial education to address pandemic learning losses
 - Address mental health and academic challenges -- Expand resources for counselors (bring counselors back to campus), advisors, Success Coaches (make Success Coaches permanent part of funding formula/scale up)
 - Provide more funding for support services to reach part-time students (FTE model does not recognize that it takes as much to support a part-time student as a full-time student)
 - Support Real College survey for colleges
 - See below – address equity needs as the demographics change
- **Address equity**
 - Help us overcome achievement gaps and support students of color and other marginalized populations better

- Recognize that equity is an ongoing process, not one initiative or strategy
- Include in equity work the need to modernize rural colleges/provide the same amenities to students in low-wealth counties (differences in infrastructure are large, and high-speed internet access still does not exist in some rural areas)
- **Increase articulation between community colleges and four-year colleges** (UNC System, NC Independent Colleges and Universities)
 - Strengthen and enforce articulation agreements
 - Work with universities to accept smaller bundles of credits
 - Enhance Reverse Transfer
- **Communicate more effectively with community colleges**
 - Provide clear, quick communications on new information that comes out to ensure everyone has the same information at the same time
 - One president: email us every other week, even if nothing to report
 - Invite presidents or trustees to SBCC meetings to share what's going on in their communities
- **Minimize the creation of work for community colleges**
 - Limit top-down initiatives
 - Reduce number of resources (such as Minority Male Success Initiative) for which colleges have to apply – provide to all colleges
 - Do consider small community colleges when opportunities come along
 - Wherever possible, allow flexibility
 - See “support” items below – System Office staffing, support, and processes
- **System Office staffing, support, and processes**
 - Reestablish use of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in IT to support colleges
 - Offer colleges construction project support (“Sherpa” role)
 - Address recruitment/retention at SO, as at the colleges
 - Solidify/stabilize leadership team
 - Produce college-level reports
 - Get staff out to colleges more to visit to understand different strengths and challenges
 - Possibly have dedicated Institutional Research leadership at a lead community college or at the System Office
 - Increase uniformity of some processes all colleges have to do for compliance
 - Provide legal and policy support on systemwide issues and templates/model policies/sample communications on common items such as HEERF that are technical or have legal implications
 - Speed up purchasing processes
 - Streamline/speed up process for construction projects
- **Get community colleges on the same page; clarify our purposes**
 - Use strategic plan to develop a shared vision for the System
 - Shift back to the System's founding purpose/mission (more technical training/adults)
 - Set an action plan together, starting with SBCC, with the associations
 - Don't accept mediocre anymore – be proud and ask for our rightful share, based on what community colleges contribute to the state and economy

- **Consider our competition and adjust accordingly**
 - Be aware of strategies undertaken by private institutions, public universities, the private sector (such as Google Grow), and other providers of traditional and nontraditional education and training
 - Recognize that community colleges are also competing with a tight labor market (rising wages for jobs not requiring education/training) and disengagement
 - Tackle the population that is ours and ours alone – adults lacking a high school diploma or high school equivalency (HSE, formerly known as GED)
 - Recognize the competitive advantage that community colleges have as a result of being embedded in their local communities
- **Continue...**
 - Advocacy (see earlier section)
 - Data dashboards
 - Professional development for colleges (and train for innovation, not just compliance)
 - Communicating with colleges, including keeping up an ongoing dialogue with presidents (such as these listening sessions) and being present with us (as Pres. Stith has done)
 - Marketing support for colleges
 - Quick responses from System Office staff
 - Collaboration among Presidents' Association, Trustees' Association, SBCC

Regional, Urban/Rural, or Large/Small College Themes

Certain challenges arose in conversation more often in certain regional meetings or were raised by colleges as unique rural or urban issues. While not conclusive, these may suggest geographic and/or large college/small college differences to consider.

- Interest in a statewide marketing campaign or marketing support was raised more by small/rural colleges than more urban and larger colleges.
- Some smaller/more rural colleges cited their small-college status as leading to unique challenges:
 - faculty/staff turnover (such as having nobody qualified to fill in if a vacancy appears)
 - college infrastructure
 - need for support from the System Office (for everything from grant writing to IT support)
 - less access to certain community college and local government funding sources
- Challenges related to disaffected youth and disengaged prospective students arose more in meetings of western North Carolina community colleges, although it did arise in other areas, including a major urban area.