



COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES
Public Policy

Final Portfolio
Carolina Across 100
30 November 2022

UNC-CH Public Policy Capstone

Maya Buebel, Molly Dashney, Jillian Everheart, Annie Lou, Adi Sridharan, and MaryFrances Warner

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....3

II. Key Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses.....5

Relationship Between Location, Race, and Socioeconomic Status..... 5

Relationship Between Opportunity Youth, Education Disadvantages, and Talent Development..... 6

Relationship Between Employment, Workforce Preparation, and Health 6

III. Twitter Post 7

IV. Blog Post 9

V. References 12

Appendix A 13

I. Introduction

As part of our Public Policy capstone at UNC Chapel Hill, our team—Maya Buebel, Molly Dashney, Jillian Everheart, Annie Lou, Adi Sridharan, and MaryFrances Warner—was partnered with Abigail Holdsclaw from Carolina Across 100 (CX100). CX100 is an initiative based out of the UNC School of Government aimed at addressing youth unemployment and educational disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the state. Our team was given both quantitative and qualitative data, and instructed to analyze each and provide write ups of our findings. We utilized information and more in-depth trends found in both data analyses to create recommendations for the Carolina Across 100 team as they work to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in North Carolina communities. Additionally, we were to create a blog post and a Twitter thread that would succinctly summarize our findings and the policy solutions we proposed based on those findings.

The data used in our qualitative analysis was collected by Carolina Across 100 through a large-scale survey focused on youth unemployment and education disruptions that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Carolina Across 100 team members traveled to counties across the state to speak with applicants, community leaders, and community members to compile responses to various questions. The data we received included information from 13 teams, each composed of one or more counties. These 13 teams are: Achieve HIGHTS! (Jackson, Haywood, Macon, Swain, Graham, Clay, and Cherokee Counties), My Future Burke County (Burke County), Lincoln County Strong (Lincoln County), Opportunity You (Mecklenburg County), Collaboration Over Competition (Cabarrus and Mecklenburg Counties), The Homestead (Caswell, Davie, Forsyth, Rockingham, Surry, Stokes, and Yadkin Counties), Opportunity Alamance (Alamance County), Summer Careers Academy (Orange County), Communities Connected for Success (Bladen and Columbus Counties), Our Future ENC - Youth Opportunities (Carteret, Craven, Duplin, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, Pamlico, and Wayne Counties), Wayne County Pathfinders (Wayne County), Wilson Workforce Alliance (Wilson County), and Rivers East Youth Alliance (Beaufort, Bertie, Hertford, Martin, and Pitt Counties).

From each of the 13 collaboratives, representing 37 of North Carolina's 100 counties, we received application information and reviewer comments in the form of application, interview, site visit, and expected supports and barriers data. These data files consist of self-reported claims from the collaborative members themselves pertaining to perceived issues and goals within their communities.

The data used in the quantitative analysis was collected by Carolina Across 100 through a large-scale survey focused on youth unemployment and education disruptions that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data we received from the Carolina Across 100 team came from the Our State, Our Work (OSOW) initiative. OSOW is a two-year program involving 37 counties in North Carolina which were divided into 13 teams composed of civic, education, business, non-

profit, religious, and government groups. These teams received University support to achieve their goal of connecting young adults to living wage work opportunities (*Our State, Our Work*, 2022). Other sources including the 2020 US Census, GIS PolicyMap, and the Food Development Index were used to better understand and contextualize provided data.

The quantitative data sets are divided into seven sections—population dynamics, business and economy, cost burdens and financial resilience, built environment, social drivers of health, talent development, and civic engagement and community connections—then analyzed in their relation to and in the context of higher education and employment in North Carolina from the 37 counties contained in the *Our State, Our Work* data.

Our team’s work with Carolina Across 100 was integral in developing our skills as young researchers. We were able to further develop our skills in qualitative analysis as we worked with Paul Mihas from the Odum Institute who taught us how to work with AtlasTI, a software system that allows one to input large amounts of qualitative data and easily see trends via coding and sorting. We were also able to improve our quantitative analysis skills through the large-scale data analysis we conducted in order to see numerical trends with which we could draw connections to our qualitative data. In order to appropriately demonstrate our findings, our team created and went through multiple drafts of written reports, helping us to better understand the intricacies of formal, research writing, particularly when dealing with sensitive subjects like race or substance misuse. Learning how to use a program like AtlasTI, how to go through so much data in a relatively short time period, and how to properly write up research findings are all skills that will be incredibly useful to each member of our team as we begin to enter the workforce.

In creating our Final Portfolio, we decided to include passages from our qualitative and quantitative analyses that showed similar patterns in the data. These passages most succinctly demonstrate our key findings from both analyses, and help to showcase our thought process when conducting our research and, ultimately, when making our policy recommendations. The connections we observed between our qualitative and quantitative findings allowed us to see trends in the data, and therefore, to draw conclusions about what the main issues for communities across North Carolina might be. The trends we observed then gave way to the policy recommendations we created.

Similarly, the blog and Twitter posts our team created were summations of the months of work we had done, and we felt that they were both good ways of quickly showing the reader what we had done. For these reasons, we have included both in our Final Portfolio as well.

II. Key Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses

Relationship Between Location, Race, and Socioeconomic Status

Our qualitative analysis indicated a connection between location and economic opportunities. In particular, we looked at Rivers East Youth Alliance (REYA) and Opportunity You (OY). The REYA team has “three Tier 1¹ counties (Bertie, Hertford and Martin) and two Tier 2² counties (Beaufort and Pitt).” As confirmed by our quantitative analysis, these counties, Bertie in particular, are heavily reliant upon typically lower-paying agricultural and other forms of industrial jobs for income. Conversely, the OY team is made up of only one county, Mecklenburg, which is a Tier 3³ county. Being the center of urban development in North Carolina, “the Charlotte region is consistently ranked as a top location for business and is home to six Fortune 500 companies and more than a dozen Fortune 1000 headquarters.” These trends follow our findings from our quantitative analysis in that Bertie County had the lowest MHI in the state, while Mecklenburg County had the fourth highest. The vast differences in MHI between Bertie and Mecklenburg Counties display how location and access to resources and connections may influence economic opportunities across the state. Disparities in these economic opportunities may, in turn, result in disparities in other parts of one’s life, such as educational attainment, healthcare access, and home location.

The impact of location on economic opportunity influences a person’s socioeconomic status. When a person cannot access well-paying jobs, their ability to provide financially for themselves and their family decreases. As displayed in our quantitative analysis, despite decreasing poverty rates across North Carolina, the substantial hardships that come with the sociological aspect of SES—social determinants of health and wellbeing, systemic barriers to economic mobility and generational wealth building, low quality education—are not going away. Both our quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate that North Carolinians still lack access to adequate healthcare, schooling, affordable housing, and employment opportunities. These differences take a toll on a person’s mental and physical health, as well as their ability to succeed in life. Thus, even if they are earning a slightly higher salary this year than last, if their overall quality of life is not increasing, their SES is not going to improve either.

An individual’s socioeconomic status plays a large role in where they can live within North Carolina as rural areas tend to be less expensive than urban ones. Our quantitative analysis showed Black North Carolinians are less likely to have access to affordable housing than their white counterparts, meaning that they are more likely to end up in rural areas than their white counterparts. In these areas, they will experience lower graduation rates—the high school graduation rate for white students was 6% higher than for Black students across North Carolina—

¹ Top 40 most distressed counties in NC

² Middle 40 most distressed counties in NC

³ 20 least distressed counties in NC

which will in turn lead to students of color working jobs that do not pay a high salary. In this way, poverty is cyclical as these kids will grow up to not have enough money, and their kids will face the same dilemmas and challenges, and likely end up in the same cycle of poverty as their parents and grandparents.

Where a person lives can impact every aspect of their life, and that location is typically dictated by race, both of which influence how much money a person can expect to earn from their job. This system ensures that poor people of color stay in rural, poor areas, while wealthy white people are able to scale the social ladder with their connections to high-paying jobs and good schools so that they and their children can continue the cycle of wealth.

Relationship Between Opportunity Youth, Education Disadvantages, and Talent Development

Building upon the relationship between location, race, and socioeconomic status, the variable factors of education and future opportunities can be addressed and alleviated through education and development within these communities. Our qualitative application data and quantitative talent development data showed that education and preparation have the greatest potential to influence future employment or higher education involvement.

The current opportunity youth were drastically impacted by the pandemic during extremely developmental periods, resulting in the need for new, adapted supports, and community groups, family, friends, and mental health professionals may be best positioned to help opportunity youth that are most in need. Opportunity youth are defined as individuals, aged 16-24, who are not employed or enrolled in school. Local community organizations identified the need to support opportunity youth as a means to strengthen those individual's circumstances, as well as the community's progress and development as a whole.

The most important educational trends seen in the data were related to establishing educational and career pathways, recovering from the learning disparities brought about by the pandemic, and creating equal access to technology for the purpose of learning and education.

Understanding the relationship between these three points of data indicates the need to begin supporting awareness and exposure to higher education and employment at an earlier age as a means to decrease the gap which opportunity youth experience. The majority of opportunity youth have either a lack of education or access to resources to further their employment or education. Solutions lie in K-12 education and in community organizations to help expand exposure.

Relationship Between Employment, Workforce Preparation, and Health

Our quantitative and qualitative analysis also provided insights into employment and health challenges facing local communities. Our quantitative analysis focused on the changes of the employment population in different industries and counties during the pandemic; our qualitative analysis examined how counties described their efforts, plans, and needs in preparing residents, particularly opportunity youth, for employment. We added health as an additional variable, and further looked at the relationships between health, employment, and socio-economic status.

While industries in North Carolina lost a total of 180K employees in 2020, some communities have developed programs to help opportunity youth build trade and soft skills to succeed in a career, typically in these industries in need of labor. Such programs will help the opportunity youth to enter the workforce and improve economic stability, as well as help bridge the gap of labor in certain industries caused by the pandemic. These workforce development programs have great potential to be implemented on a broader scale and benefit a larger population across North Carolina.

In addition to skill development, local organizations in low-income communities have recognized substance abuse as a significant barrier that prevents opportunity youth from employment. However, due to limited insurance and healthcare coverage, these organizations find it difficult to address these challenges. Overall, we find that economic conditions have a considerable influence on access to healthcare, and that over two-thirds of the OSOW counties have a lower population-to-provider ratio than the state average. A possible solution is the expansion Medicaid coverage to provide residents with better access to healthcare.

III. Twitter Post

Hello! We're a team of undergrad UNC Public Policy capstone students who have worked with CX100 to examine how N.C. counties outline the issues their populations face.

We're posting all about it today. Follow this thread to learn more! 🧵🔗



We focused on how counties discuss burdens related to opportunity youth and their economies. We conducted two analyses:

1. Quantitative data about counties' demographics, economies, and youth, collected by @CarolinaDemography
2. Qualitative application and interview data

In our first analysis, we found that in majority POC counties, unemployment, unoccupied housing, and medical debt rates tended to be the highest. Overall, there is a shared concern about opportunity youth's future employment statuses.



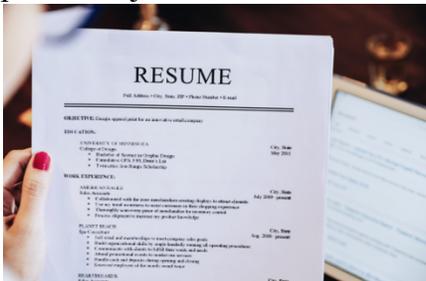
In our second analysis, we found that N.C. counties want to implement skilled trades apprenticeship programs to train youth and combat unemployment.

Counties also stressed concerns over availability of mental and physical healthcare.

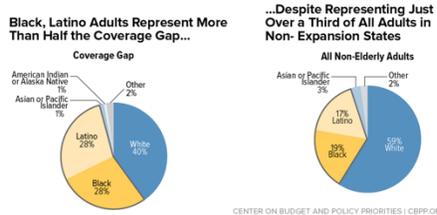


In response to our findings, we recommended four different policy options.

First, N.C. should implement statewide job-training programs to prepare youth for the post-pandemic job market.



Second, N.C. should expand Medicaid coverage so communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will have better access to quality health care and health insurance with less medical debt.



Third, N.C. counties should increase access to down payment assistance for communities of color to counter discriminatory policies that have caused POC families to face disproportionate economic burdens to homeownership.



Finally, counties can implement programs to connect opportunity youth to substance misuse and mental health services to increase their chances of finding personal, academic, and financial success.



Thanks for following along! For a more in-depth look into our research, check out our quantitative and qualitative data summaries and analyses below!

Quantitative Analysis:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gTD2A8wXrdFSs0L4e90UZ1c3dyErF3BD/edit?usp=sharing&oid=103466351331384168550&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Qualitative Analysis:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ystwcz7_AF2ux-0YgSPZvy6ytA0_5Qnx/edit?usp=sharing&oid=103466351331384168550&rtpof=true&sd=true

For a more in-depth summary of both of our analyses and policy recommendations, check out our presentation on our work here!

Presentation, Policy Recommendations:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14aFDONeH1NTPI8zuHWpnc74yKugT-K7GKjRtakaszA/edit?usp=sharing>

IV. Blog Post

After COVID-19, What's Next in These North Carolina Counties?

Hello! We are undergraduate students in UNC's Public Policy Capstone course who have worked with Carolina Across 100 to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected populations in North Carolina counties.

COVID-19 struck in March 2020 and disrupted state counties. Large and small businesses faced economic hardship, schools closed, and employment rates plummeted. North Carolinians—youth

in particular—experienced major educational disruptions and struggled to find work that paid a livable wage. Our partner, Carolina Across 100, collected data through their Our State, Our Work program and visited 37 counties to collect self-reported feedback on issues each county faces.

Our Findings

As a team, we analyzed the data from the participating counties and created policy recommendations based on our findings. Here are some notable trends that we found:

- Counties with emigration rates higher than the state average also had excessive costs of living, suggesting that people moved from these counties due to financial hardship.
- 14 counties have shown the same or lower unemployment rates compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- 23 counties have yet to return to the same unemployment level.
- The three industries most impacted by the pandemic are: Accommodation & Food Services, Manufacturing, and Arts & Entertainment
 - Around 74K North Carolinians lost their jobs in 2020 in the Accommodation & Food Services industry alone
- Counties with a larger Black population, more opportunity youth (young adults between the ages 16-24, who do not attend school or work), and higher unemployment rates tend to have the least amount of occupied housing, largest cost burdened population, the most debt, and the highest eviction rates

A common trend across nearly every county in the participating cohort is the struggle to connect with opportunity youth. Most counties struggled to connect youth with educational and job opportunities during the pandemic. Additionally, in counties where there is a large population of underprivileged, underserved citizens, they express a need for workforce preparation in youth. In counties where there is a large low-income population, they express concerns over residents' mental and physical health, inequitable resource conditions, barriers to accessing the healthcare system, and difficulties to address substance abuse among youth due to limited insurance coverage.

Our Recommendations

To combat the negative effects that have been amplified by the pandemic, we suggested 4 policy recommendations:

1. Statewide job-training program to prepare youth for the job market - a common concern among participating counties was that their youth populations would struggle to gain employment due to factors such as available opportunities and educational disruptions. Hence, we recommend for the state government to fund a virtual job training program that would provide NC youth between ages 16 - 24 with necessary professional skills, such as how to craft a resume.
2. Expansion of Medicaid coverage in NC - the pandemic exposed a troubling trend across many NC counties - racial health disparities. Low-income people of color were disproportionately burdened by the pandemic, largely because many were not covered by Medicaid or another public health insurance program. We urge the state government to expand Medicaid coverage to include more low-income families, which would reduce the statewide racial gap in health outcomes.
3. Increasing Access to Down Payment Assistance for Communities of Color - A concerning trend across participating counties was that African Americans were less able to afford housing than

White individuals. This is troubling because a lack of consistent access to housing can have damaging effects on educational attainment, health, and employment outcomes. We recommend bolstering access to down payment assistance programs for first-time African American homebuyers to help them pay for housing with less debt.

4. Programs to connect OY to substance abuse and mental health services - Several teams highlighted substantial barriers that prevent youth from accessing mental health and substance abuse programs in their counties, including poverty, inaccessible public transportation, and more. As a result, youth in these counties are at elevated risk for mental health conditions and substance abuse. We advocate that local teams collect and analyze data on available treatment in their counties and create programs that overcome significant obstacles to mental health assistance.

V. References

North Carolina Department of Commerce. (2021, November 30). *County Distress Rankings (Tiers)*. NC Commerce. Retrieved November 16, 2022, from <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers#TierRankingbyCounty-495>

Appendix A

This table displays the breakdown of race, location, and SES. These three factors are major indicators for the presence of the rest of the issues for which we coded. Using the information in this table, you can predict which of the other codes will appear in a specific county based on what their predominant racial demographic is, how wealthy their citizens are, and where the team is located.

Team Name	Rural, Urban, or a Combination?	Wealthy or Poor?	High Minority Population (>40%)?
Wayne County Pathfinders	Rural	Poor	Yes
Wilson Workforce Alliance	Rural	Poor	Yes
Opportunity Alamance	Rural	Poor	No
Rivers East Youth Alliance	Rural	Poor	Changes depending on county
Lincoln County Strong	Rural	Poor	No
Communities Connected for Success	Rural	Poor	Yes
My Future Burke County	Rural	Poor	Yes
Achieve HIGHTS!	Rural	Poor	No
Opportunity You	Urban	Wealthy	Yes
Collaboration Over Competition	Urban	Wealthy	No
The Homestead	Combination	Poor	No

Our Future ENC	Combination	Poor	No
Summer Careers Academy	Combination	Wealthy	No