



SCHOOL OF
GOVERNMENT
ncIMPACT
Initiative

This American (Work) Life: Challenges & Opportunities in the Workforce

Where are the Workers Webinar Series
April 25, 2023



This
American
Life

Poll Question

Prologue

Act 1: Data on Young Workers



Act 2: Experiences from an Employer



Act 3: Voices from Across the State

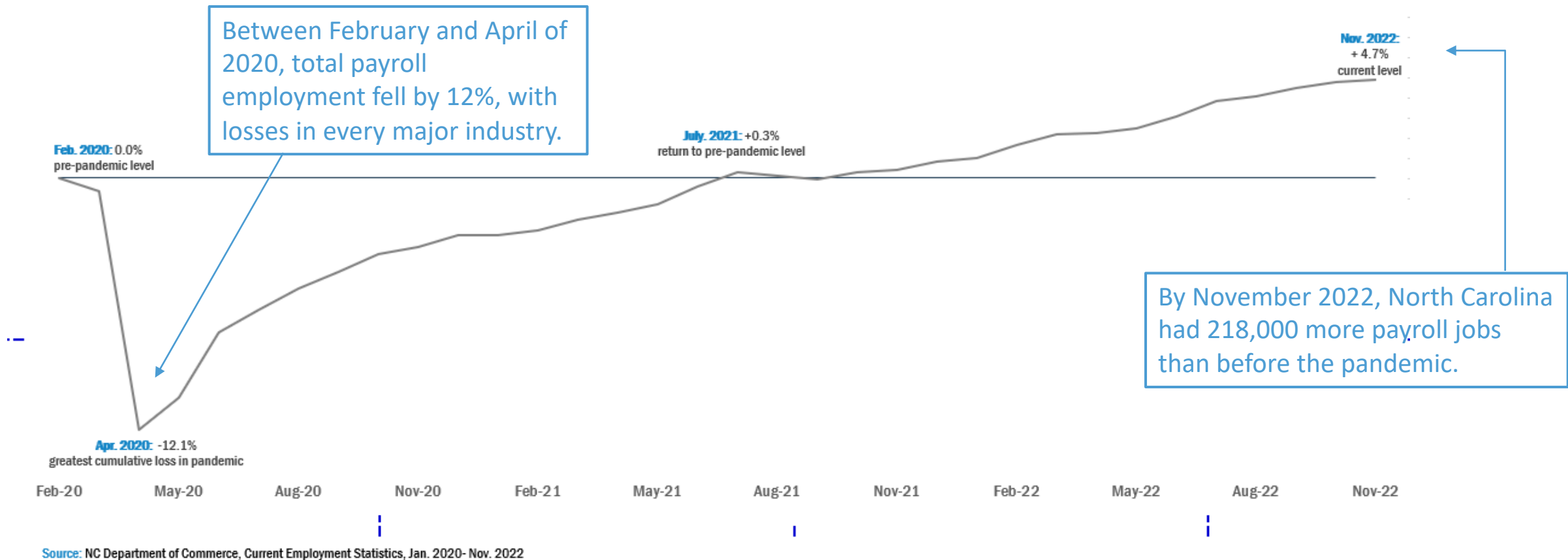


Act 4: Sharing Your Insights



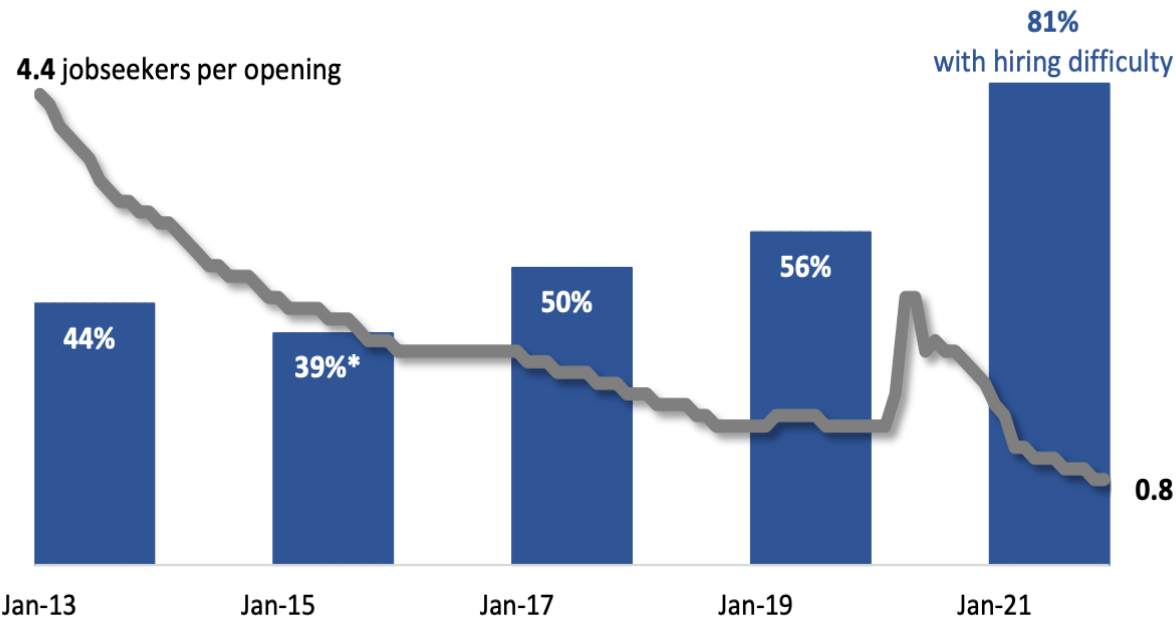
Agenda

Prologue - A Rapidly Changing Picture



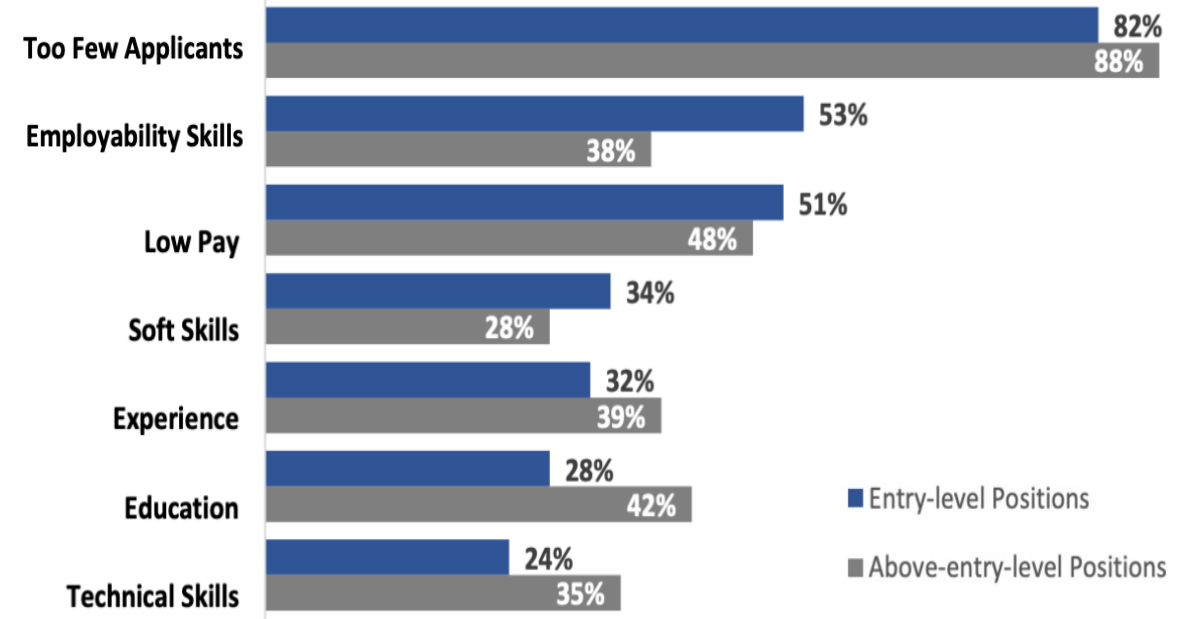
Prologue - NC Employers Facing Hiring Difficulties

Fewer Jobseekers per Opening,
More Employers Reporting Hiring Difficulties



**No statistical significance in hiring difficulty from 2013
Bars represent reference period asked in Employer Needs Surveys*

Reasons for Hiring Difficulties



Act 1: Data on Young Workers

Jonathan Guarine

Economist, NC Department of Commerce

Opportunity Youth in North Carolina



Jonathan Guarine

Economist

NC Department of Commerce
Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)

April 25, 2023

Who Are Opportunity Youth?

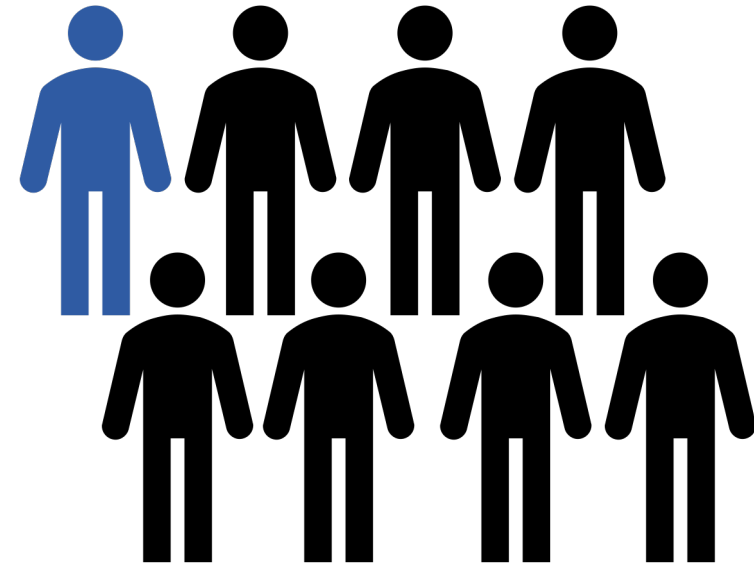
Teens and young adults ages 16 to 24
who are neither in **school** nor **working**

“**Opportunity youth** often face hardships, but they also report having feelings of responsibility for their futures, having educational and career goals, and being optimistic about achieving their goals.”

– *Youth.Gov*

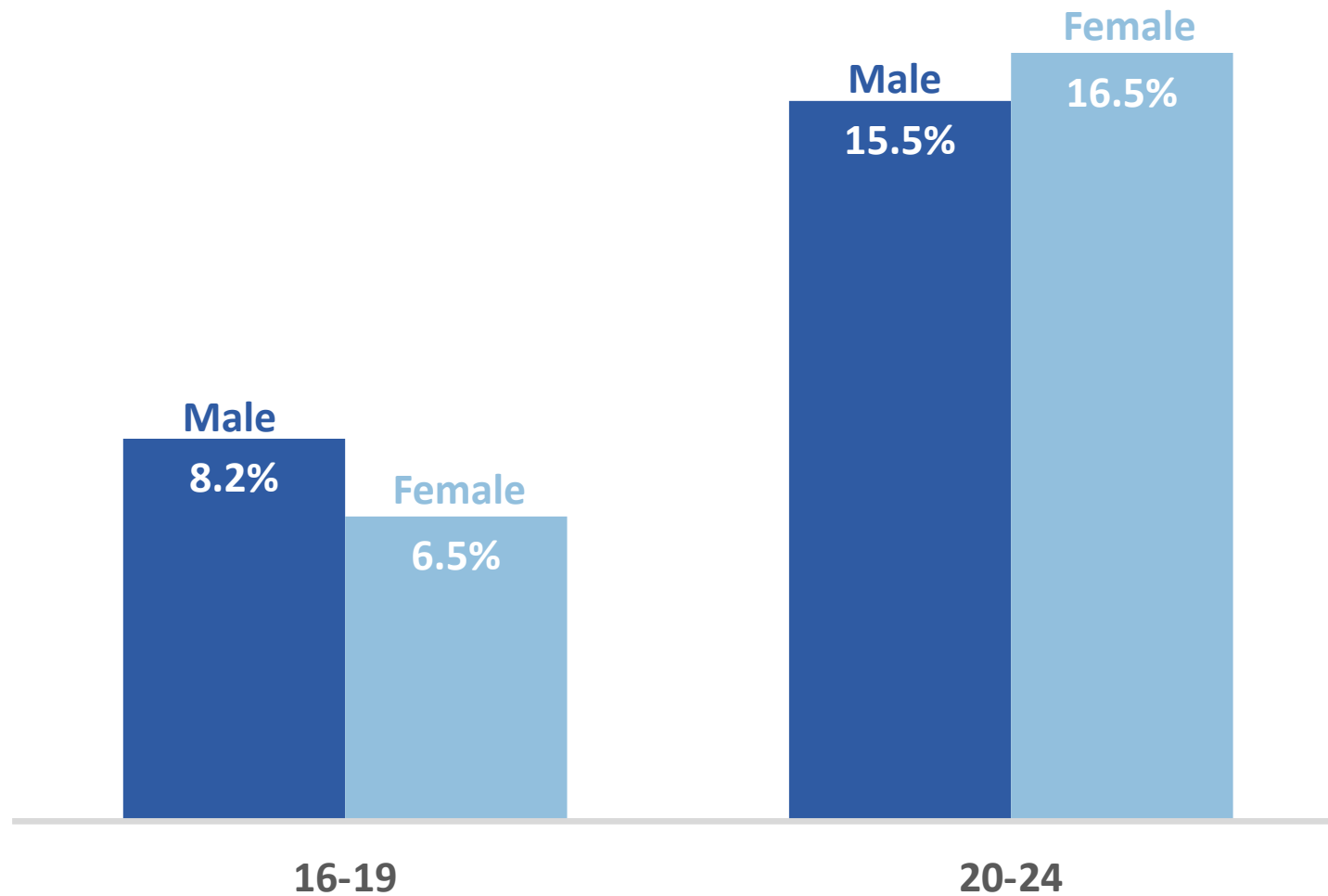
155,000 NC 16–24-year-olds neither in school nor working in 2021

1 in 8 NC youth

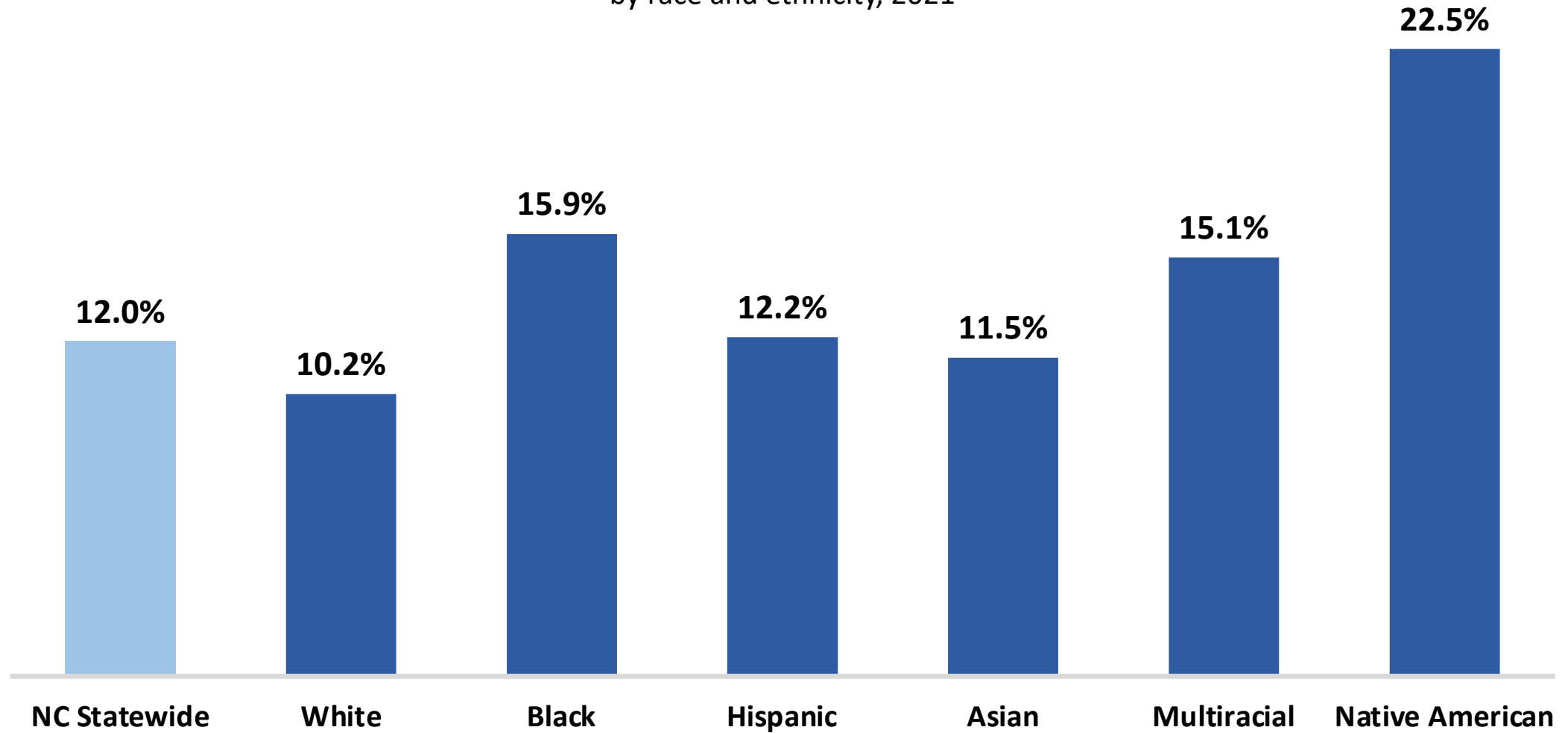


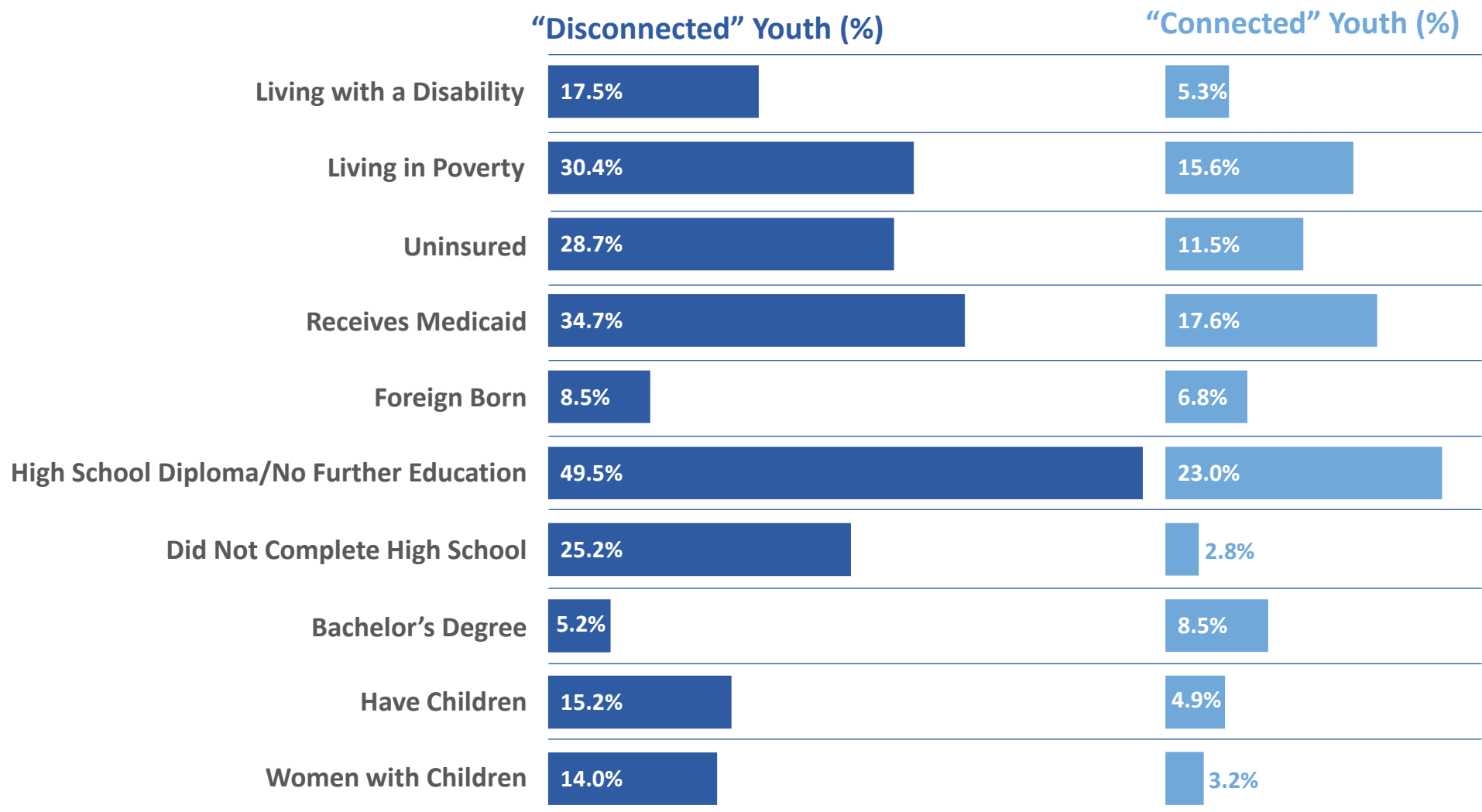
Percentage of Opportunity Youth (NC)

by age group and sex, 2021

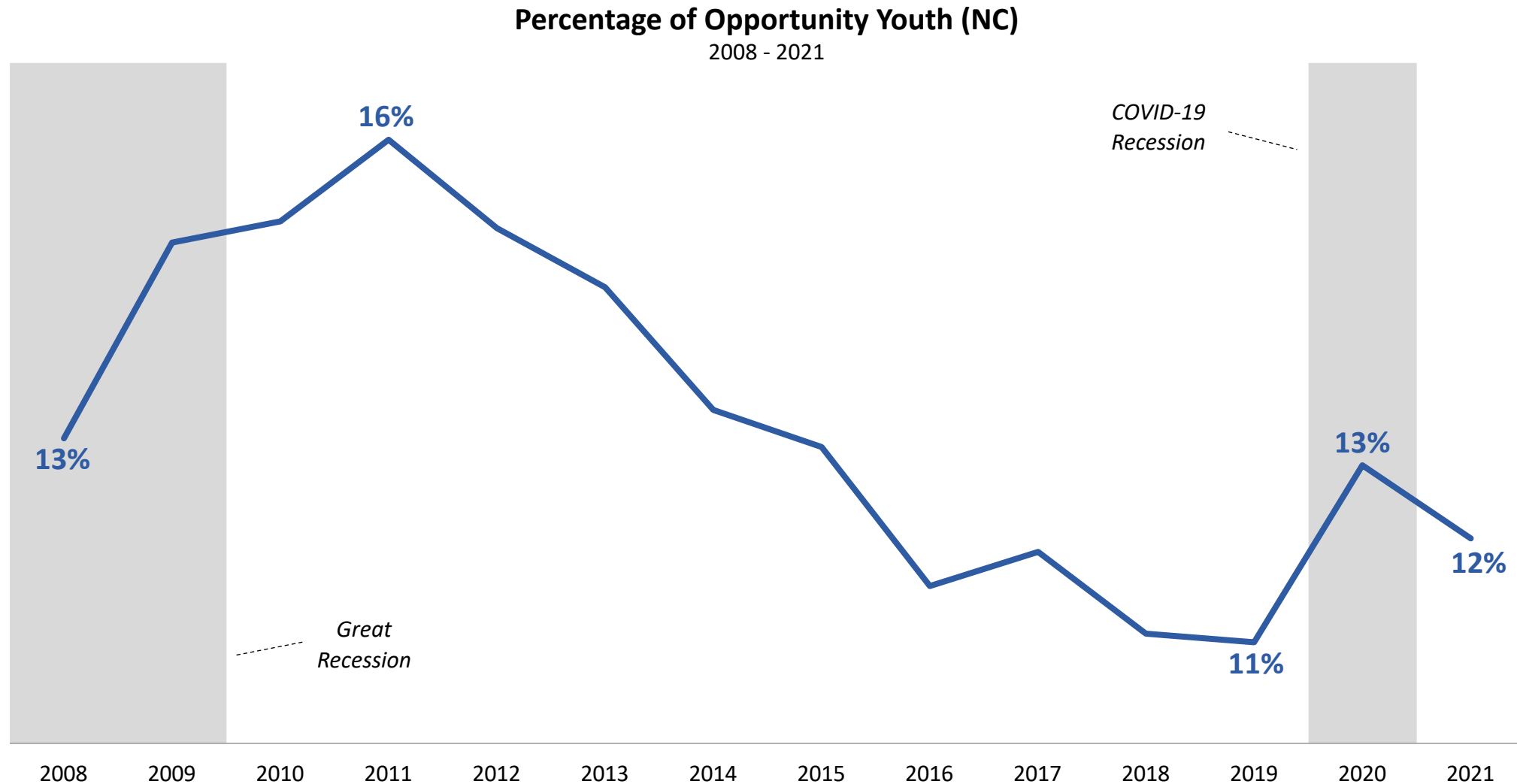


Percentage of Opportunity Youth (NC) by race and ethnicity, 2021

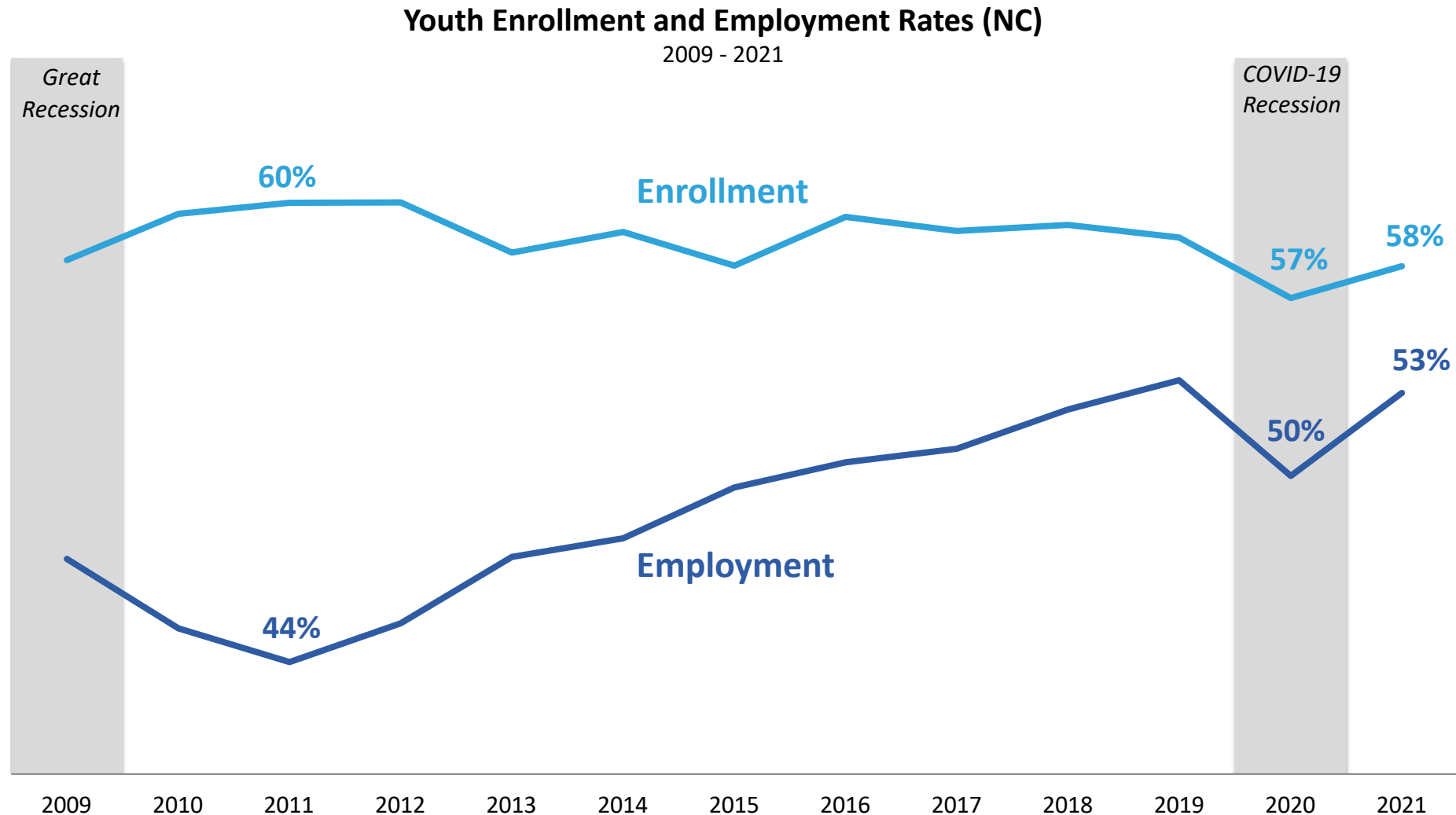




A Decade of Progress and COVID-19 Disruption

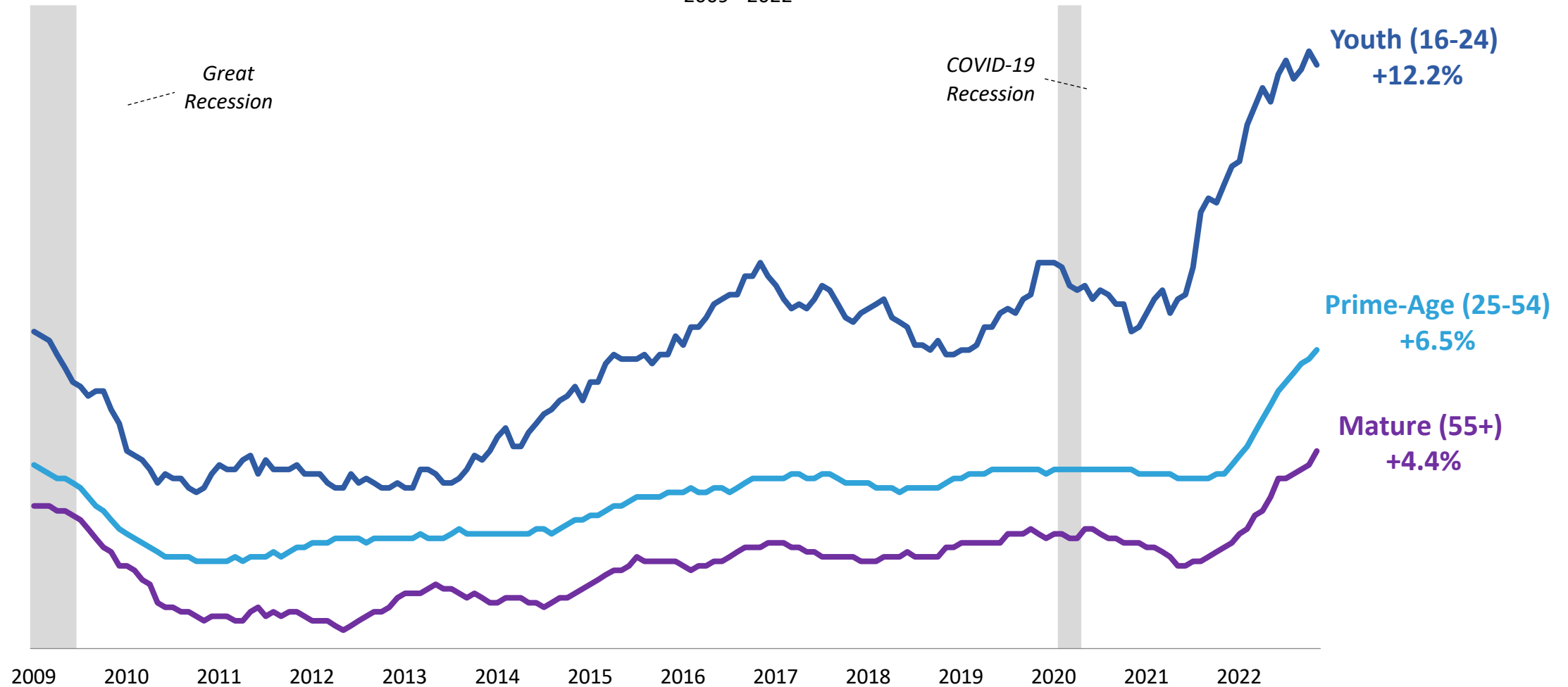


Employment-Driven Youth Connection

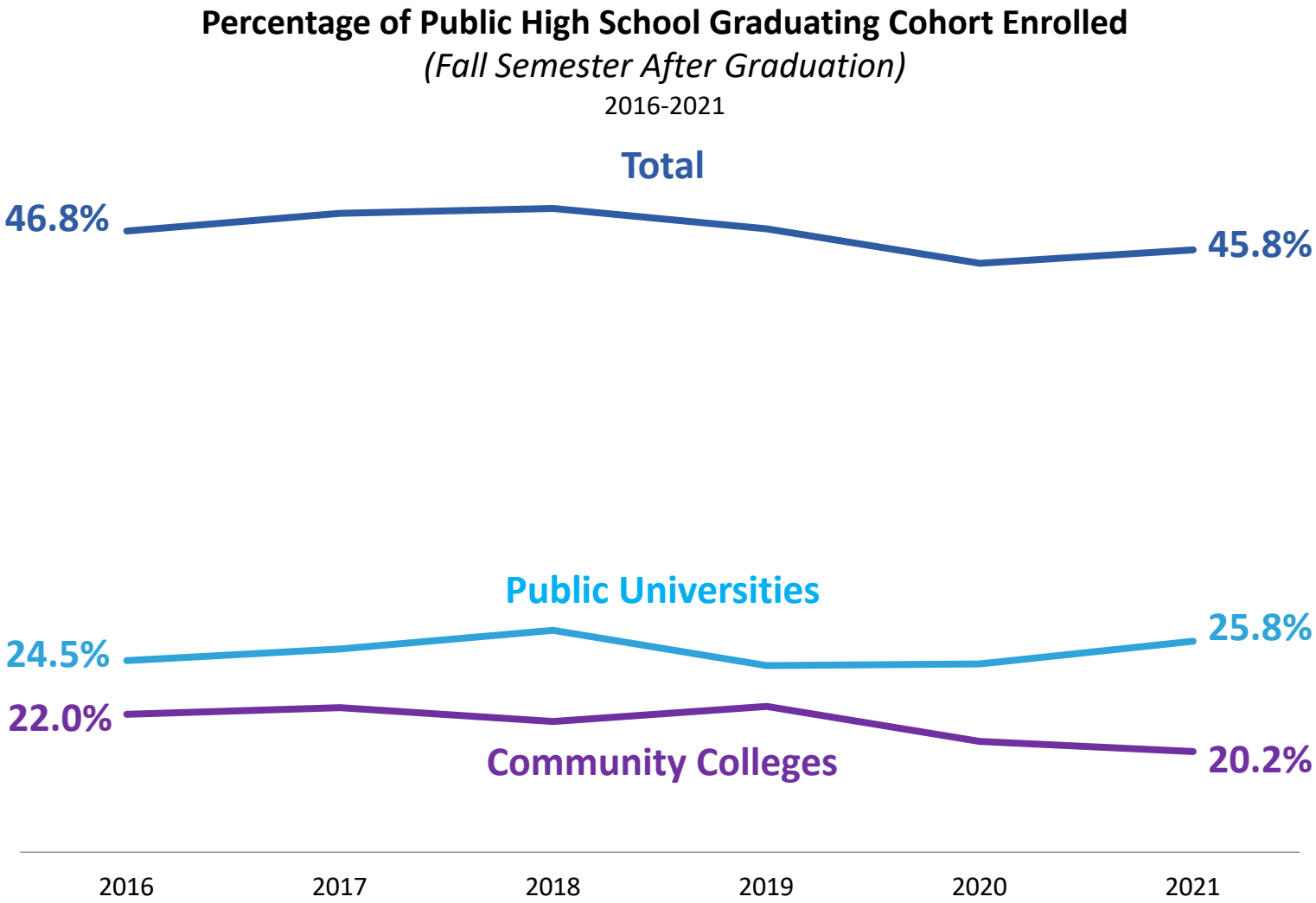


Young Workers See Biggest Wage Gains

12-Month Moving Averages of Median Wage Growth
2009 - 2022



Declining Immediate College-Going Rates



Opportunity Youth Takeaways

COVID-19 increased challenges for youth, but there was a **quick rebound** by 2021

- The **rapid economic recovery** contrasted with the post-Great Recession period
- **Fast wage growth** fueled **employment opportunities** for youth
- **Demographic subgroups** continue to have differing experiences

Education challenges remain but present an opportunity

- **Long-term career readiness** remains forefront in the post-pandemic era
- **Work-based learning** alongside more traditional education routes

Community action and **social capital** are critical for opportunity youth engagement

Thank you!

Jonathan Guarine

Economist

NC Department of Commerce

Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)

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Article Links

- [From Disconnection to Opportunity: Youth Labor Force Engagement in North Carolina](#)
- [Analysis of Recently Released Data Suggest Youth Disconnection Declined in 2021 After Climbing During the Pandemic](#)
- [Employment and Higher Education Enrollment of High School Graduates in the COVID-19 Era](#)

Act 2: Experiences from an Employer

Kevin Austin

Yadkin County Commission & Business Owner

Act 3: Voices from Across the State

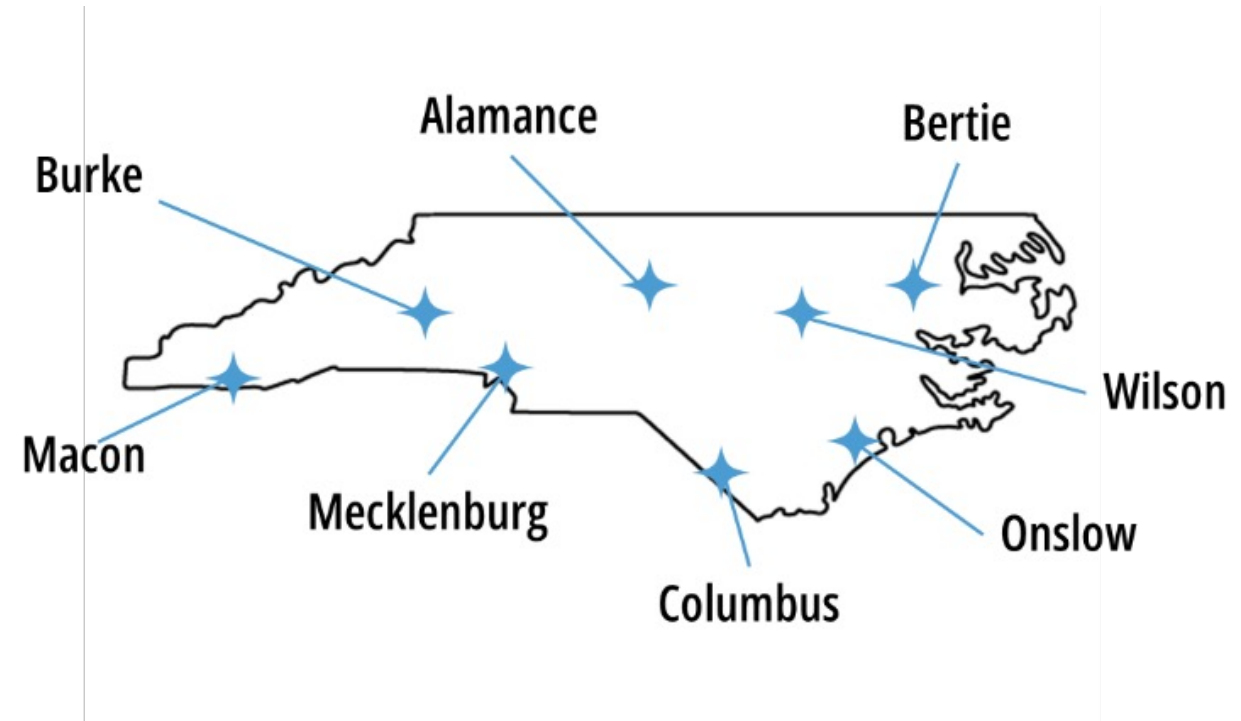
Carolyn Fryberger
Assistant Director, NCGrowth

Jess Dorrance
Research Director, ncIMPACT Initiative

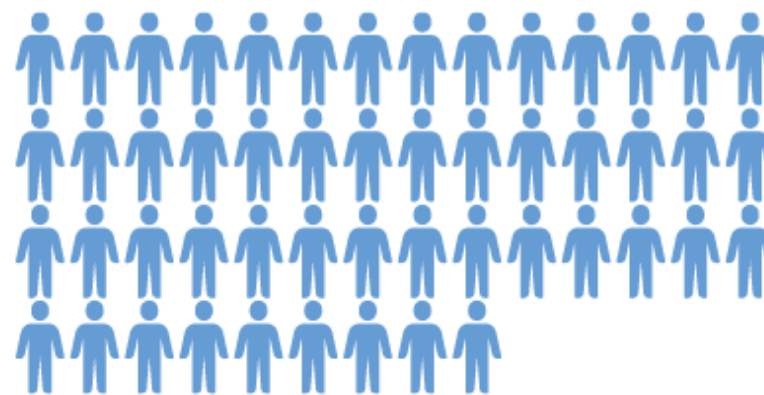
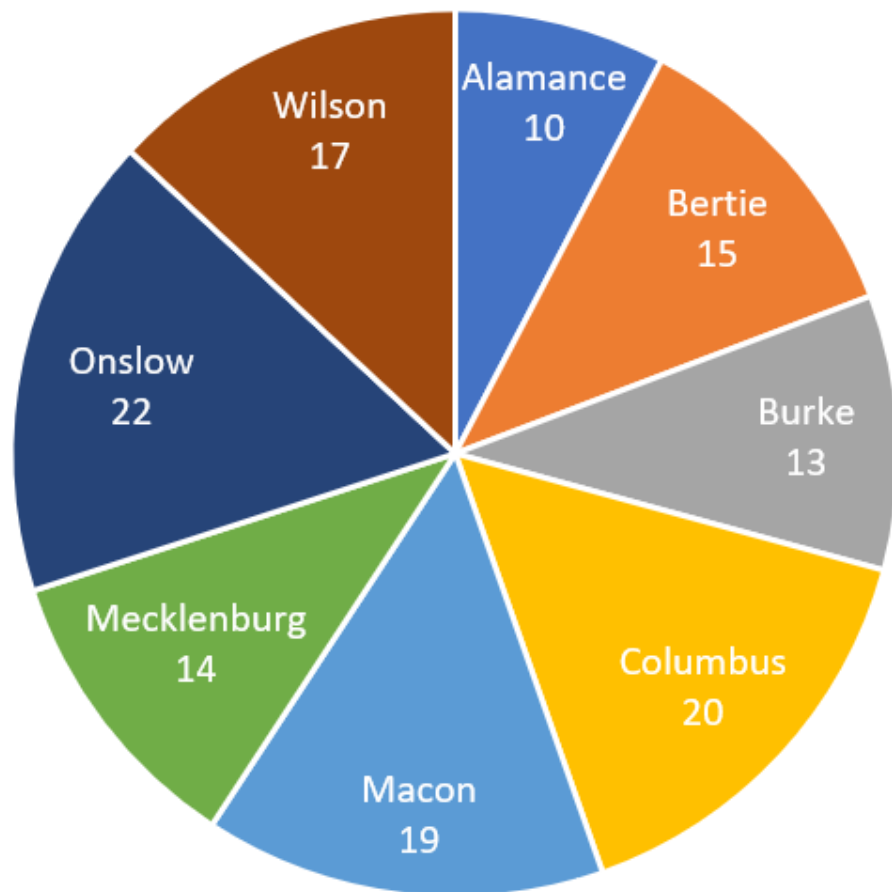


Who We Talked To And How We Listened

- ncIMPACT and NCGrowth collaborated on a series of focus groups across all 8 of NC's prosperity zones
- Talked with employers, workforce support providers, and young adults about their experiences
- Focus group conversations were recorded and transcribed; thematic analysis is ongoing



Focus Group Participants



51%
WORKFORCE
SUPPORT
PROVIDERS

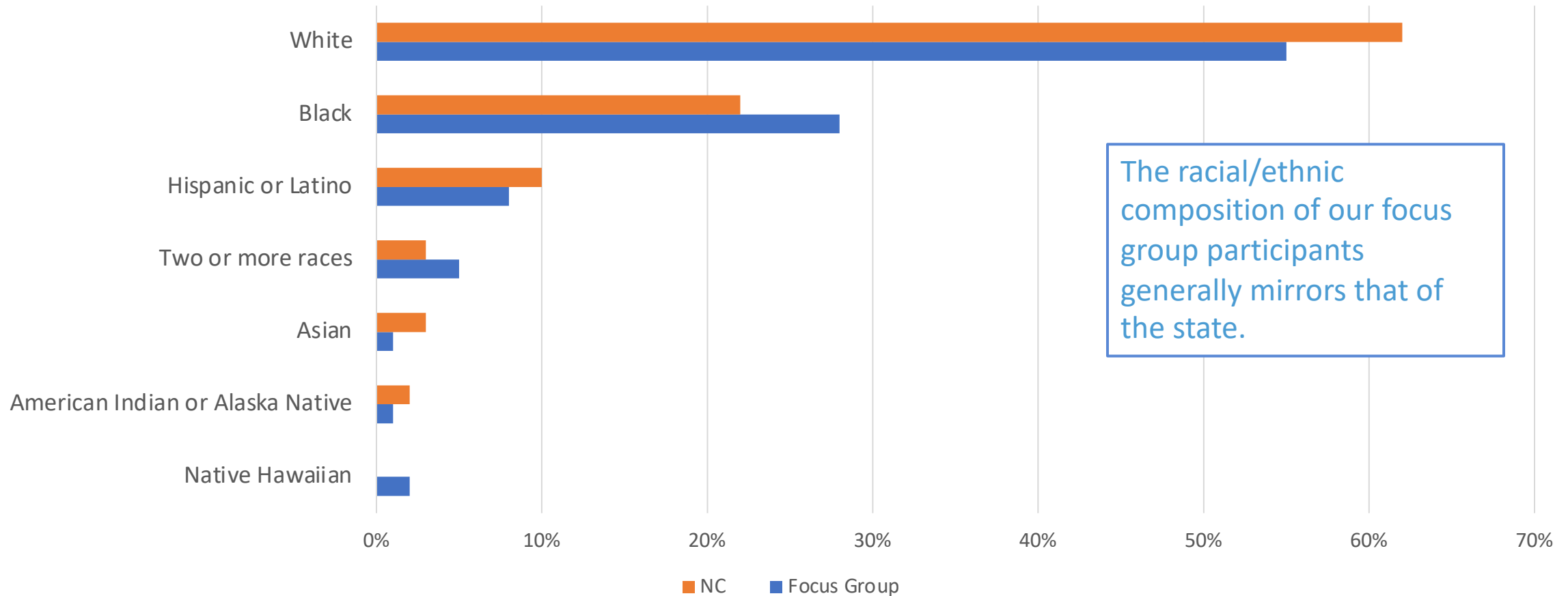


30%
EMPLOYERS

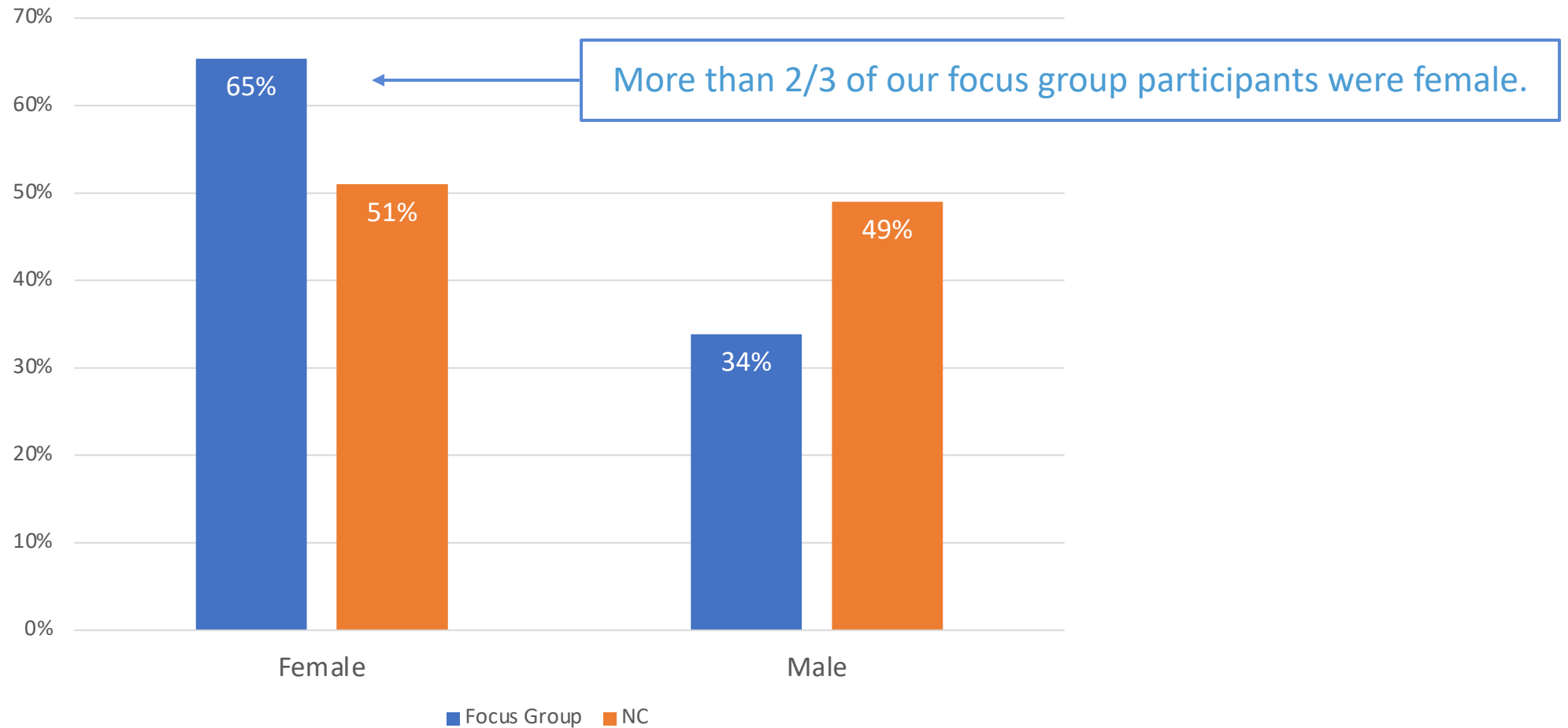


19%
YOUNG ADULTS

Focus Group Participants



Focus Group Participants



Diverse Voices Represented

EMPLOYERS

Manufacturing

Healthcare

Restaurant/Hospitality

Local Government

Education



SUPPORT PROVIDERS

NCWorks/NextGen

K-12 & Comm. Colleges

Department of Social Services

Nonprofit Organizations



YOUNG ADULTS

Average age = 22

~ 40% have a high school degree or less; ~ 60% have some post-secondary education

A mix of young people who were in school, working, both, or neither at the time of our FG



Employers

- Mixed feelings that the quality of workers has changed/declined
- A willingness among some to be more creative and flexible with benefits and workplace environment
- High demand for soft skills



Workforce Support

- Significant concerns about mental health and wellbeing of young workers
- Concerns about barriers to employment
- Seeking to expand how they expose young workers to employment opportunities
- Working with employers to adapt/expand hiring practices
- Training needs for young workers AND employers



Young Adults

- Seeking employers who value flexibility and growth as well as inclusiveness and openness related to diversity (and neurodiversity)
- Motivated by salary/wages, but equally by other benefits, the workplace culture
- Some reported not feeling respected in the workplace; they do not want to just be someone's employee
- A few mentioned systemic/structural barriers

Noting Areas of Disconnection

- Young workers talked frequently about work being a place to develop relationships and be part of a supportive, caring community
- The employers we spoke to generally sought to create supportive work environments, however, there seems to be some disconnections between what employers are doing to meet employee needs and what young workers experience in those work environments.
 - In a few cases, employers expressed awareness of needing to better meet employee needs but being uncertain how best to do that.
- Employers also shared mixed reactions regarding the work ethic of young adults.
- Overlaying all of this is an awareness across all of our focus group population that mental health is an area of concern and needed attention, including in the workplace.

Perspectives from Young Adults – Inclusiveness, Respect, Diversity, Flexibility

“

*This isn't from my personal experience, but I have a lot of physically disabled friends. And for them, school and work can be really hard because most employers or educators **don't interact a lot with people who have physical disabilities**. So, they struggle with finding people who are like, "Hey, it's okay. You can't come in today." Or if you're having a bad week, or if your arthritis is so bad that you can't hold a pencil because they have never had to deal with it before.*

- Young Adult, Franklin County

“

*My ideal work environment is to work with people that are loving, respectful, caring, who are also doing their jobs. Yes, we're here to make money, but we also respect each other and care about each other. **I wish employers know that people are real**.*

-Young Adult, Bertie County

“

*I think post-COVID, if you're not providing support or **flexibility** to your staff, you're probably struggling a little bit. That's what I look for in a job. And mobility within....*

***Growth and stability** are two major factors within looking for a career. If you get a job and it's just a job, besides the money, what's the point in keeping working there?*

-Young Adults, Burke County

Perspectives from Employers – Acknowledging a Shift, Working to Adapt

“Usually, employers are in positions of power. That dynamic has reversed these days, and **employers need to realize that the employees with their services are in demand, and they need to be adapted to them.** We need to make some kind of seismic shifts in our philosophy in order to accommodate that.

- Employer, Columbus County

“So, every position that we have has a **career development step plan.** So, it's like you'll start out as a trainee, within a year you'll be a telecommunicator one. The next year you'll be a telecommunicator two. There's a three, **and every year you get a raise.** We have a step plan for every program down to a maintenance worker.

- Employer, Onslow County

“And when I talk to employers, they're still thinking like they thought seven or nine, ten years ago, before COVID. And so, I'm like, 'You're going to have to think differently about how you're ...**appealing to this new wave of people.**' Whether that's offering them different PTO or something. So, I'm like, I'm just telling you, you cannot just post something up on your job board and think they're going to come to it.... **you're going to have to cultivate the younger generation. You're going to have to figure out a different way to recruit them.** And if you don't get in front of a classroom through some of the organized programs, we have or get teachers to do externships, or open up to let people come in and see what [the] real time is, it's going to be hard. They're not going to just read a piece of paper....Plus, a lot of companies, I tell them this too, I'm like, 'I don't know who is creating your job descriptions, [laughs] but y'all have got to change.' And I'm not the answer to that. I'm just saying that's something else I hear a lot from the students that graduate and call me after they've graduated.

- Employer & employment support provider, Wilson County

Perspectives from Employers – Changing Employees

“

But without question, the level of individuals that are coming into the workforce today definitely is not what they were several years ago. Simple things - we're in a factory environment, so not accessing their phone when you're trying to feed work at a steady flow.

-Manufacturer, Wilson County

“

*...some of the challenges that we see on the front end are that **an individual's grit is changed.** They (young workers) don't want to stick through the training, through the amount of time to get to the next level.*

- Mecklenburg County

“

*It's their [young peoples'] expectations that has changed. They're still looking for the handouts. They're still looking for all the freebies and **they're just not wanting to do for themselves.***

- Employer, Onslow County

“

*They [young workers] would drop and tell you, 'I quit, and walk out the door. No questions. **I just find they're privileged.** They're the younger crowd who are not sticking around till retirement level.*

-Employer, Bertie County

Perspectives from Support Providers – Mental Health

“

*The lack of **mental health resources availability** and the urgency, especially for children that have extreme behavioral and emotional needs. I would say that's a huge area that we're really, really behind on.*

“

*I work with Job Corps, but I work with all four of the Job Corps centers in North Carolina. So, a trend that we have seen, especially after the pandemic, is that a lot of **our students are coming in with more mental health diagnoses.***

“

*I have also seen an increase in dropout rates as well because **they feel like that they're stuck.** They're mentally and emotionally in worse places.*

“

*I had one guy, a 24-year-old, at my office when I got back from the meeting today, crying because they had made him feel dumb. And he has some mental health issues, but he could work at McDonald's. But yet they **made him feel like he didn't know how to do anything.***

Next Steps

Ongoing Analysis and Dissemination

- Created code book and conducted a matrix analysis to assess initial themes
- Nvivo qualitative analysis software to go deeper into coding transcripts
- Ongoing analysis to further identify consistencies and any places where these data diverge
- Additional webinar participation to continue reporting our findings
- Final written report(s)

Act 4: Sharing Your Insights

Participant Experts (that's each of you)

Breakout Room Discussions

- What resonated?
- What surprised you?
- What else do you want to know?
- What would help make this information actionable?





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Questions?

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