

CAREER ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

(Alamance County)

PROGRAM PROFILE

“I am 19 years old and talking to my friends about a 401K.” — *Current apprentice*

“Unless Alamance County grows its own, it will not have the workforce pipeline it needs.” — *Current employer*

What Is the Career Accelerator Program?

The Career Accelerator Program (CAP) is a four-year apprenticeship program that both addresses the immediate need for skilled workers and seeks to grow the next generation of leaders in manufacturing facilities in the Alamance County area. Launched in 2016, the program offers technical career opportunities to motivated high school students and provides them employment after their graduation. Partner companies train these apprentices to fit their highly-skilled, technical job needs, and the students graduate with a guaranteed job and valuable postsecondary credentials. CAP is largely patterned after the award-winning Apprenticeship 2000 program in the Charlotte region and the North Carolina Training Apprenticeship Program in the Research Triangle region. It has been particularly valuable for local employers in the Alamance County area, given their need to build a talent pipeline from within the local labor market.

The estimated scholarship value of a CAP apprenticeship is \$140,000. The program is an intensive, four-year, in-depth combination of on-the-job training at the partner company’s facility and classroom learning at Alamance Community College. CAP is coordinated by the Alamance County Area Chamber of Commerce. This local chamber’s level of involvement in community educational programming is uncommon.

Who Are the Partners?

- Alamance County Area Chamber of Commerce — Coordinates the program.
- Alamance Community College — Offers an Associate in Applied Science Degree in Mechatronics Engineering Technology, as well as additional training opportunities for stackable certificates and elective classes.
- Alamance-Burlington School System — Provides career development coordinators who work with the students while they are in high school.
- Ten partner companies — Host onsite apprenticeship training.
- Mentors — Support and train apprentices while at employer companies.



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How Does the Program Work?

CAP works closely with the Career Development Coordinators (CDCs) at participating local high schools. These CDCs and other core subject teachers make referrals to the program. In addition, each fall, CAP representatives hold informational sessions for all faculty and staff, as well as interested students and their parents or guardians. After learning about the CAP apprenticeship requirements and timeline (either at a session or by talking to a CDC), students and their families are required to take a facility tour at a minimum of one CAP company. Thereafter, the student applies to be a CAP apprentice.

During their first year as apprentices, seniors in high school attend school for two classes in either the morning or afternoon and then train at the partner companies for the remainder of the day. Once apprentices have graduated from high school, they work Monday through Thursday at the companies and attend classes on Friday at Alamance Community College (ACC).

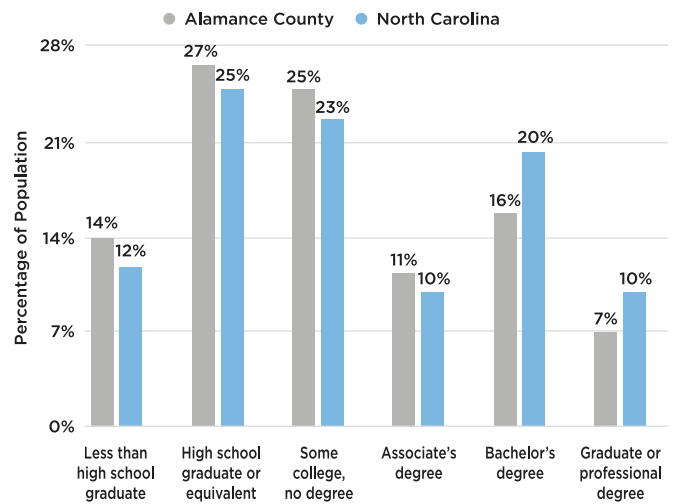
Apprentices receive training at ACC in the following areas: electrical, mechanical, computer technologies, physics, mathematics, automation, and robotics. At the end of the four years, an apprentice will have an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Mechatronics Engineering Technology, a Journeyman Certificate from the N.C. Department of Commerce, and four years (6,400 hours) of on-the-job training. This positions him or her well in a county where only approximately a third of residents ages 25-64 have attained a postsecondary degree, as shown in **Figure 1**.

An apprentice is paid for hours worked at the company both during the high school year and after graduation. After graduation, the apprentice is paid for time spent in classes at ACC. Employers also pay for books, fees, and tuition.

Non-academic supports come from both classrooms and companies. CDCs teach interviewing techniques, conduct skills and interest assessments, and share information about opportunities in the local labor market for students while they are in high school. Once they are out of high school, the apprentices work with their mentors on employability skills and financial literacy. These mentors are given a two-day training session at ACC to prepare them for this work. Finally, there are monthly gatherings aimed at building connectivity among all the apprentices. These gatherings are hosted by participating companies on a rotating basis and typically include a non-job-related presentation on soft skills or finances.

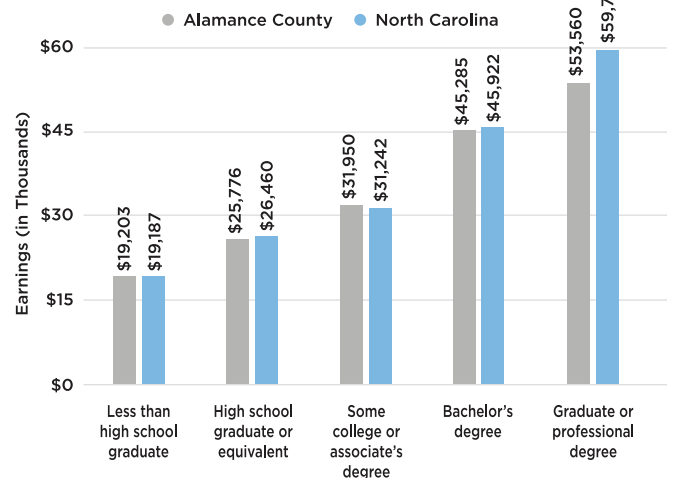
Graduates of the program begin with a salary of \$35,000, which is higher than the median earnings for Alamance County residents ages 25 and over with some college or an associate's degree, as shown in **Figure 2**.

FIG. 1: **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT** (Ages 25-64)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

FIG. 2: **MEDIAN EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT** (25+)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



P-12



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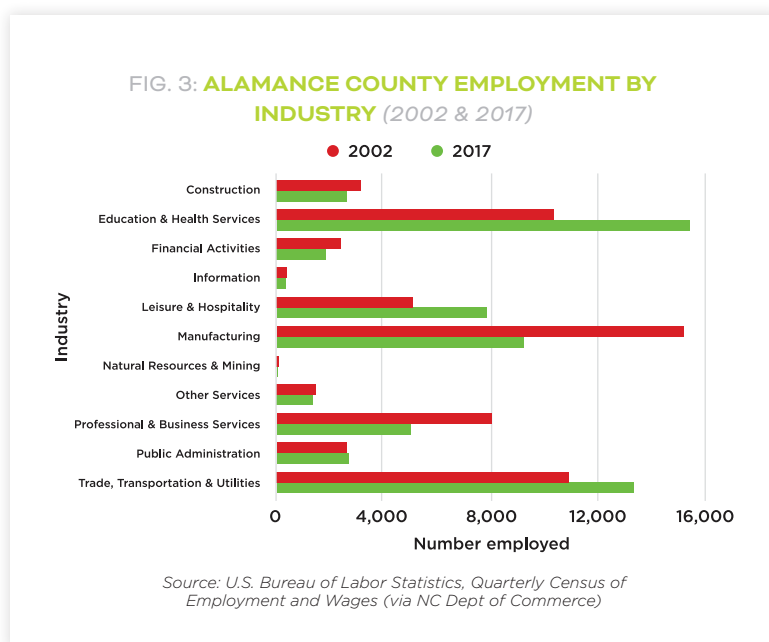
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What Is the Governance Structure?

CAP operates on a hub-and-spoke model, with the Chamber of Commerce acting as the hub. The links between and among partners are strong. For example, ACC and participating high schools report that a strong system for supporting each other makes it possible for high school students to take machining classes at ACC, for both institutions to identify students with strong potential for the CAP program, and for reciprocal shadowing programs between faculty from each institution to improve alignment of respective curricula. As another example of strong links, ACC has worked closely with employers to schedule instruction at times that least conflict with the apprentices' job duties. CAP recently received a grant to hire a coordinator who will be tasked with building an even more robust feedback loop between ACC, employers, and apprentices.

Is the Program Data Driven?

The program has not set a specific goal for the number of apprenticeships it hopes to provide. However, CAP is focused on building a pipeline for the number of job openings expected in manufacturing in coming years. Participating companies expect turnover to reach up to 25 percent over the next decade due to retirements. For one partner company, that means 30 people. For another, it implies 450 open jobs. Everyone involved with CAP recognizes that the employees who replace retirees will need some degree of postsecondary education. When one plant manager was asked how many people with only a high school diploma the company would likely hire in the next five years, he responded, "About zero percent." The school system is now partnering with NC Works to better understand labor market data and the opportunity to build additional pipeline programs. See **Figure 3** for changes in Alamance County's employment by industry over time.



What Are the Indicators of Success?

The first indicator of success is the increasing number of students applying for CAP. The program is building buzz, with 400 students attending information sessions in the third year of the program's existence. The current apprentices deserve much of the credit for the awareness and excitement about the program. They are happy to attend informational sessions and talk to students during facility tours. They also serve as ambassadors in less formal ways and places. One apprentice explained that he just can't stop talking about the program. Retention rates, too, have been encouraging: only one apprentice has left the program in its three years.

The second indicator is the increasing number of companies seeking to join the program. CAP started with seven companies. They now have ten, with others lined up to join. Companies recognize that, in addition to the apprentices, there is value in the exposure that comes from participating in CAP — especially in a tight labor market. Families



P-12



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hear about participating companies at informational sessions and have a chance to tour individual companies with students. Often, family members themselves end up applying for positions.

The third indicator of success is the growing relationships among the CAP partners. Beyond CAP, employers and the school system are exploring new ways to expand the talent pipeline for manufacturing. They have noted the need for a manufacturing career pathway in high school.

What Is the Promise of the Strategy for Increasing Educational Attainment in North Carolina?

This program allows students to obtain a degree and valuable, relevant job experience at relatively no cost to them or their families. Even after the apprenticeship ends, students can take advantage of the tuition reimbursement program offered by every participating employer.

There are limits to how much a program that is as human resource-intensive as CAP can scale in Alamance, but the value extends beyond the number of apprentices. Already CAP has spawned new priorities for alignment and explorations of additional ways to build a talent pipeline for manufacturing in the region.



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