



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EDUCATION

IS EVERYONE'S

BUSINESS

North Carolina's public schools are building the workforce of tomorrow – with programs aligned to industry needs, early college partnerships, and career pathways that lead directly to employment.



Strong public schools serve as the foundation of our economy by:

1. Helping businesses attract and retain talent right now.



Nearly two out of three North Carolina businesses had difficulty hiring in late 2023 and early 2024, [according to a report](#) by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's NCWorks Commission.

- While that number is down from 81 percent in 2021-2022, it's still a major concern for employers across the state.
- Nearly half of employers report that education and employability skills are a factor contributing to their difficulty hiring for experienced positions.

Additionally, many industries, including [healthcare](#), education, manufacturing, hospitality, and the [nonprofit](#) sector, face ongoing labor shortages that exacerbate hiring difficulties across the state. In fact, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce data shows North Carolina has a "severe" labor shortage across all industries, with [76 workers available for every 100 jobs](#), as of August 2025.

To attract and retain skilled workers, North Carolina must ensure it's a state where people want to live and raise a family.

- Nearly [three quarters of North Carolina](#) employees say they would be more committed to their current employer if their employer offered more family-friendly practices like paid leave and child care supports.
- North Carolina employers cite child care and transportation as the two main barriers to hiring in the NCWorks report.
- [Research has shown](#) time and again that access to good local public schools is a consistent top reason people choose where they want to live.

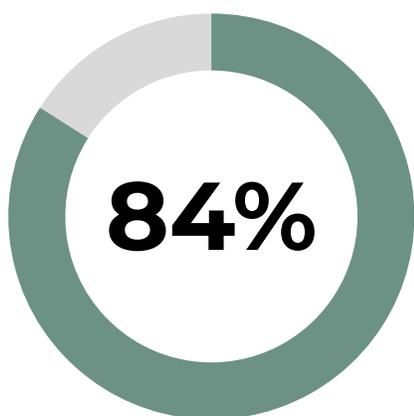


Strong public schools attract families and businesses. School funding directly affects the quality of education local schools can provide. Yet North Carolina ranks 50 out of 51 in the nation (including DC) for per-pupil spending and 50th in the nation in overall funding efforts. Investing in public schools makes North Carolina a more desirable place work and live and helps you attract and retain your most valuable employees.

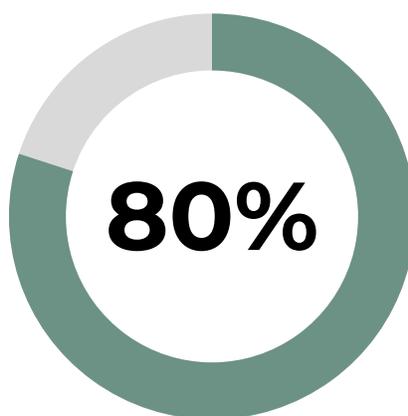
2. Preparing the future workforce.

Last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the College Board released a joint study of 500 hiring managers across the country that “reveal an urgent readiness gap.” Notably:

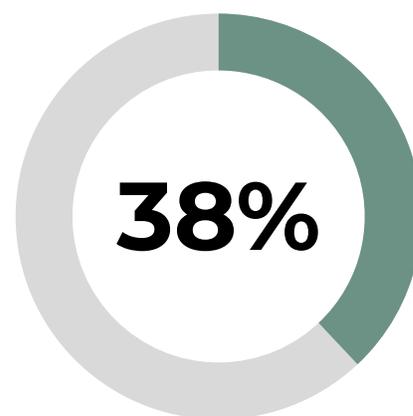
84 percent of hiring managers say most high school graduates are not prepared for the workforce.



8 in 10 hiring managers say today's graduates are less prepared than previous generations.



Only 38 percent of hiring managers say it's easy to find candidates with the right skills.



On top of that, business leaders recognize that students today need more than technical training to be ready for the workforce.

- 94 percent of hiring managers prioritize critical thinking and problem-solving, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and College Board study.
- Similarly, a [2022 survey of employers](#) in Western North Carolina and a [2023 survey of Wilmington area employers](#) found that employers are searching for employees who:
 - are responsible and have self-discipline;
 - take initiative; and
 - possess great communication, critical thinking and time management skills.

Strong public schools drive workforce development, giving students both the academic credentials and the skills you need to help your business succeed: critical thinking, communication, initiative, and responsibility. Teachers are the number one school related factor that affect student outcomes and learning. Yet average teacher pay in North Carolina is \$14,000 below the national average, and North Carolina has yet to pass a budget that includes teacher raises, even though neighboring states have done so. **Investing in teachers means investing in students – your future workforce.**



3. Helping North Carolina stay competitive.

Right now, North Carolina is ranked as a top state for business. But neighboring states with stronger, better-funded public education systems are pulling ahead, and our future competitiveness depends on the strength of our local public schools.

- Right now, North Carolina is CNBC's top state for business. But in 2024, North Carolina was second behind Virginia, [which took the top spot in part because of the state's strong public education system](#). And Virginia, South Carolina, and Alabama are pulling ahead of NC on education funding. All three of our neighbors invest more per student and have passed teacher raises in their state budgets, while North Carolina remains the only state in the nation without a budget at all.
- North Carolina's ranking as a top state for business is due in part to stronger past investments in education that contributed to the strength of our state's current workforce.
- Multiple state efforts by business leaders focus on the state's ability to remain competitive, including two particularly notable plans:
 - the North Carolina Chamber's [North Carolina Vision 2030](#) plan.
 - the North Carolina Department of Commerce's [First in Talent](#) plan.

Strong public schools will help make North Carolina [the uncontested national leader in business and economic opportunity](#). To maintain our standing as a top state for business, we must match our ambition for economic recruitment with a powerful commitment to the education of our children and youth.

I'M READY TO BECOME A BUSINESS CHAMPION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS! WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

1. Invite us to speak

We would love to speak at your local chamber or association event. Email Jen Rifkin at jrifkin@ncforum.org to coordinate.

2. Join our community of business champions.

[Click here](#) to receive periodic email updates about our efforts to build a network of business champions.

3. Talk with your peers

Talk with fellow business leaders and members of your community about the state of public education in North Carolina. You can use our resources [here](#).

