



NCACC President Kevin Austin Leads Pathways Initiative
NC Counties Guiding Our Next Generation to a Brighter Future

During 2019-20, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) President Kevin Austin is leading a presidential initiative titled, *Pathways Initiative, NC Counties Guiding Our Next Generation to Brighter Futures*. The mission of the Pathways Initiative is to develop strategies for counties to reduce the rate of disconnected youth, those not in school and not working.

The Issue

Youth disconnection affects the social and economic fabric of the entire community. When youth become disconnected by withdrawing from school or work, it disrupts their social and professional development. And, if they remain out of the workforce very long, they may never be able to recover their lost earning potential as adults. From an economic perspective, businesses are chomping at the bit to get ahead, but they cannot find qualified people to help them.

Youth disconnection also leads to increased costs for counties in lost revenue and increased spending on social services and public safety. According to a recent report by Opportunity Nation - a coalition of non-profits focused on closing the opportunity gap in the U.S. - young adults who are not in school or working cost taxpayers \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services.

Related Federal Programs

Various federal programs can help disconnected youth, and in recent years legislation authorizing federal workforce development programs has placed a greater emphasis on disconnected youth. The primary authority for federal workforce development efforts is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Title I of the Act funds a variety of programs jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education in conjunction with state and local partners. WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014. Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority, and it is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years. WIOA authorized a variety of programs to help out-of-school youth and work-based training programs from 2015-2020. Congress must reauthorize WIOA to prevent the programs from expiring.



The County Role

Counties are on the frontlines of local economic and social challenges and there are many strategies counties can employ to reduce the number of disconnected youth. The NCACC Pathways Initiative seeks to reduce the rate of disconnected youth while closing the skills gap throughout North Carolina. Focusing on disconnected youth will help communities attract and retain local talent, thereby addressing population stagnation or decline in rural areas. The initiative will explore specific ways to help youth attain education and be ready for the modern workforce, including options for experiential learning, technical training, certification, and higher education in conjunction with the community college system.

The Year Ahead

This fall, NCACC President Kevin Austin appointed the Pathways Initiative Task Force, Co-Chaired by Karen Howard, Chatham County Commissioner and Mike LaBrose, Vice Chair of Caldwell County Board of Commissioners. The Task Force, comprised of 17 commissioners from across the state, will gather information about successful programs across North Carolina that engage youth to help guide them on a path to career success. The Task Force will meet several times throughout the year and the work will culminate in a report and roadmap for counties across the state to identify possible solutions.

NCACC welcomes the opportunity to share lessons learned through the Pathways Initiative and is eager to work with federal and state partners as Congress prepares to reauthorize WIOA for FY2021. Together, we can build on recent progress and continue to strengthen programs that help our youth and our economy thrive.

For more information on the Pathways Initiative, visit www.ncacc.org/nccountypathways.

About NCACC: The [North Carolina Association of County Commissioners](http://www.ncacc.org) (NCACC) is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. The Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of advocacy, research, risk management and education and leadership training.