Higher Education’s Urgent Mission: Reconnecting with Adults
Higher Ed: The Eras Tour
America’s population base has shifted
Adult learners are the only way to reach state attainment goals

North Carolina - like most states - has a gap between what we need to grow economically and current attainment levels

Current gap: 444,000 more college graduates
Why is higher education so bad at serving adults?
The Message to Adult Learners is Broken
Adult educational attainment is not equally distributed by race / ethnicity (2021)
Equity issues also exist at the program level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex and Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2018 Median Earnings</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction Trades</td>
<td>$47,663</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Technologies/Technicians</td>
<td>$46,693</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision Production</td>
<td>$45,479</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences</td>
<td>$41,285</td>
<td>4,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services</td>
<td>$40,761</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities</td>
<td>$29,675</td>
<td>7,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Culinary Services</td>
<td>$25,573</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and Performing Arts</td>
<td>$25,446</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$22,236</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A joint effort to serve adult learners in NC

- Goal is a 2% increase in credential attainment for Black, Hispanic, and Native adults
- 23 colleges in NC (150+ nationally)
- State-led and coordinated

Focus on all adults [Adult = Independent FAFSA]
- 15 colleges (expanding to 20)
- Philanthropy-led
The NC Reconnect Model

Direct outreach to former students

Dedicated PR and digital marketing

Grant funding for customized adult learner support

Cohort-based professional development
BRCC Target: Adults 50% through a program with no credential

What did we do?
- FREE COLLEGE Campaign
- Redesigned recruiting process
- Redesigned marketing materials and translated into Spanish
- Focused on imagery of people working as opposed to classroom
- Purchased adult learner “starter kits”
How did we do? What does the data show?

NC Reconnect Results:

- Overall enrollment increase 9.17% in Fall of 2021
- **Adult learner enrollment increase 41.42% Fall 2021**
- Overall minority enrollment increase 20.59% Fall 2021

- Overall enrollment increase 13.32% Spring 2022
- **Adult learner enrollment increase 33% Spring 2022**
- Overall minority enrollment increase 17.48% Spring 2022

Success Coach Data –

- Fall 2021 – 97% of the students assigned to a Success Coach successfully completed the semester
- Spring 2022 – 94% of the students assigned to a Success Coach successfully completed the semester
- Fall 2022 – Early indicators so far show a 95% success rate
Lessons from the field: Blue Ridge Community College

- Let the data help you identify your gaps – make real time adjustments in operations
- Whatever you did before probably doesn’t work now
- You have to market to adults different
- New way of recruiting - Go to where the students are
- You cannot sit back and wait for them to come to your institution - this model doesn’t work anymore
- You need to have a financial package to assist them - they cannot quit work to come back to school
- Success Coaches are essential for adults – engage with adults differently
- You have to pretend like they know nothing about college and hold their hand
- Adopt a new level of flexibility in your work inside the classroom and outside the classroom
- Change the attitude on your campus
- Don’t wait, do this NOW- CREATE a sense of urgency
NC REACH Model

1) **Credentials to associates pathways**
   - All colleges have mapped four certificate to associate degree pathways in high-value sectors (Healthcare: 24; manufacturing/construction: 19; transportation/logistics: 12; public safety: 12; IT: 10; biopharma/life science: 2)
   - Expanded alignment between adult basic education, curriculum, and continuing education

2) **Bundled, sequenced supports**
   - Expanded advising for adult basic education and workforce & continuing education students
   - State investments in emergency grants ($1.5M/year)

3) **Culturally sustaining practices**
   - Trained two cohorts of Equity Coaches (third cohort starting fall) to support colleges in analyzing data and developing strategies to improve outcomes for adult learners of color
   - Colleges will work in cohorts this fall on shared policy, practice, or process improvement
Legislative Support for Adult Learners

● $2M legislative investment to expand adult learner pilot programs.

● Provided 29 colleges with mini-grants
  ○ 67% spent on direct marketing, 22% on outreach and enrollment, 11% on faculty and staff

● Provided 18 colleges with InsideTrack outreach (fall 2022) and coaching (spring 2023)
  ○ Prioritized outreach to underrepresented adult learners
  ○ 194 students returned, 570 expressed interest in returning and received coaching.
    ○ 24.6% contact rate, 6.4% return rate
  ○ Spring reenrollment demographics: 39% Black, 22% Hispanic, 30% White
  ○ For a successful reenrollment campaign, data quality, project management, and leadership buy in are critical
Overall Impact

- The number of adult learners enrolling in NC community colleges increased by 10% from fall 2020 to fall 2022.

- 62% enrolled in workforce and continuing education programs, 28% in curriculum degree programs, 10% in adult basic education.

- Among adults, enrollment of Hispanic /LatinX students increased 30%, Black students increased 12%, American Indian Alaskan Natives increase 10%, and White students increase 4%.

- Adult learner completion decreased 13% from 2021 to 2022.
**NC Reconnect/Inside Track Reenrollment Campaign**

**Cohort 1 & 2 combined Fall ‘21 and Fall ’22 Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Enrollment Rate</th>
<th>Increased 1 Term Tuition (Fall '21 and Fall '22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Outreach</td>
<td>21,514</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>18.66%</td>
<td>$2,122,625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-enrollment outreach campaign for NC Reconnect Cohort 1 Fall 2021 and Cohort 2 Fall 2022
What we've learned

- Adults **want** to return to college (but maybe not for a degree)...we have to make it work for them
- The first four weeks are the danger zone...after that adults succeed
- When state leadership + and Presidents care...it gets done.
Thank you!

Mike Krause
John M. Belk Endowment
Mike@jmbendowment.org

Dr. Laura Leatherwood
Blue Ridge Community College
Leatherwood@blueridge.org

Dr. Patrick Crane
NC Community College System
Cranep@nccommunitycolleges.edu