



---

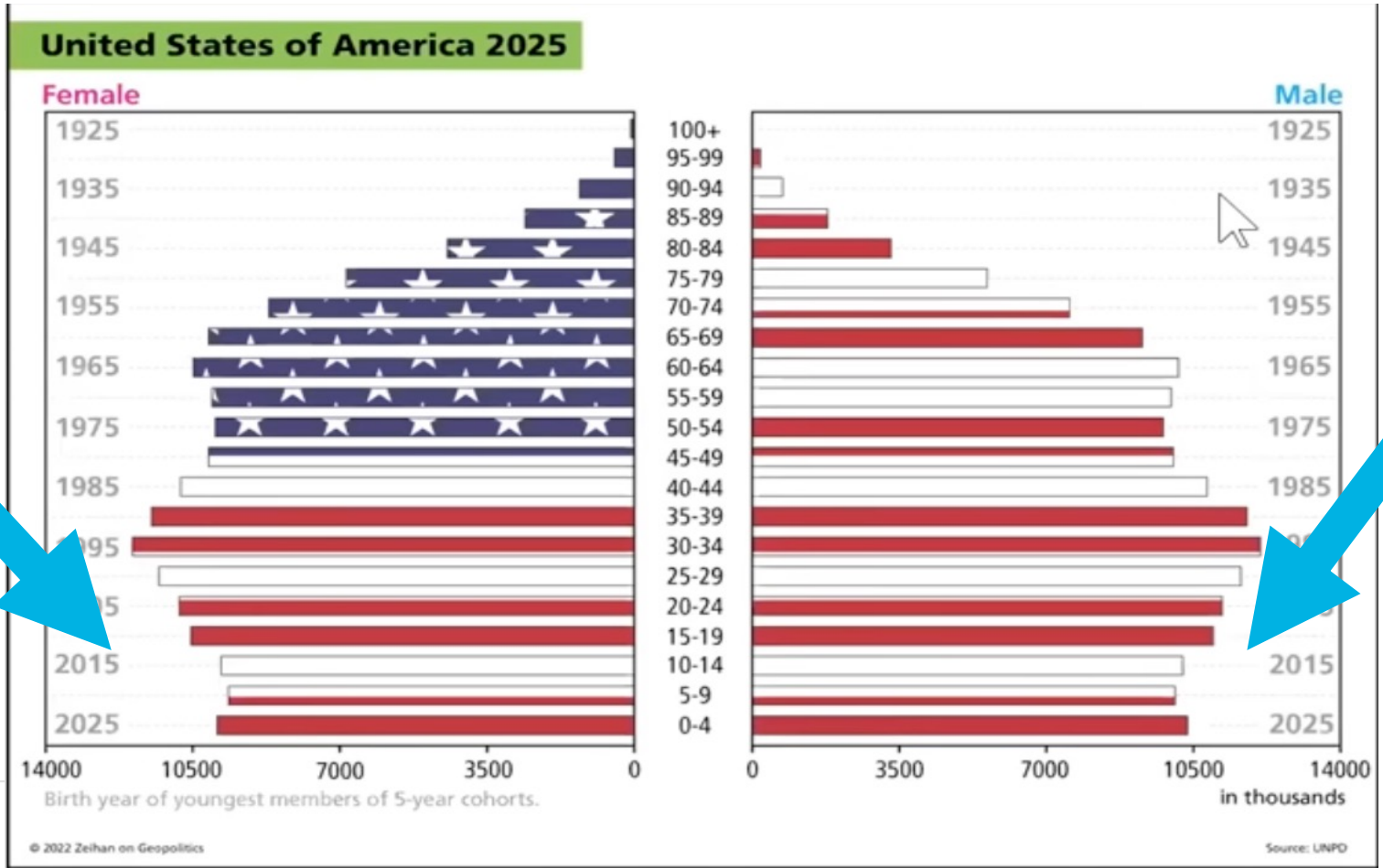
# Higher Education's Urgent Mission: Reconnecting with Adults



# Higher Ed: The Eras Tour



# America's population base has shifted



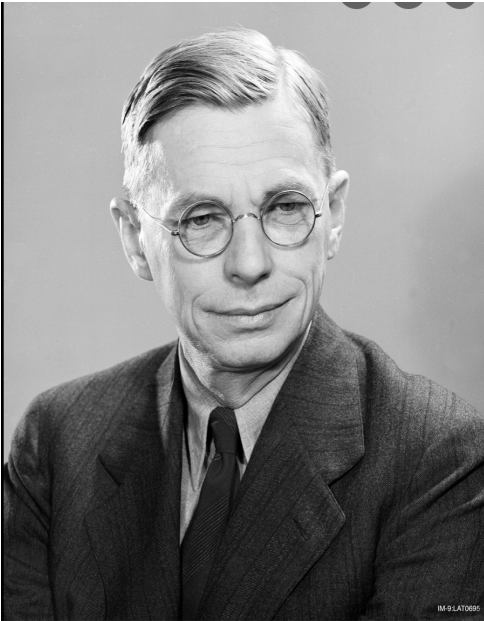
# Adult learners are the only way to reach state attainment goals



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?



=

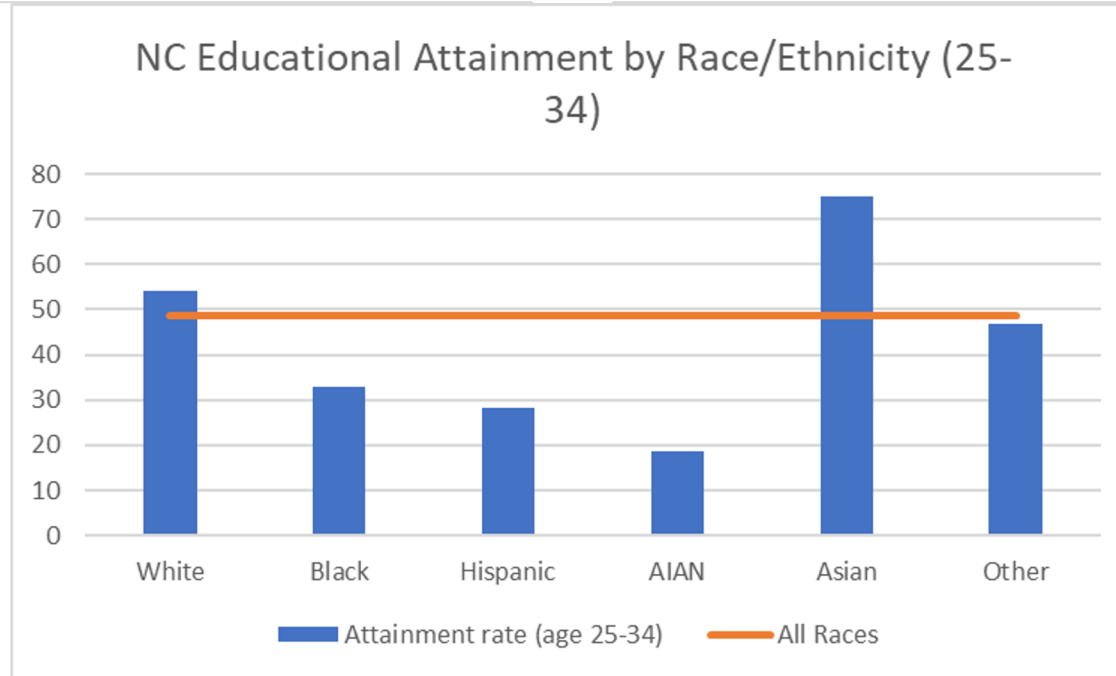




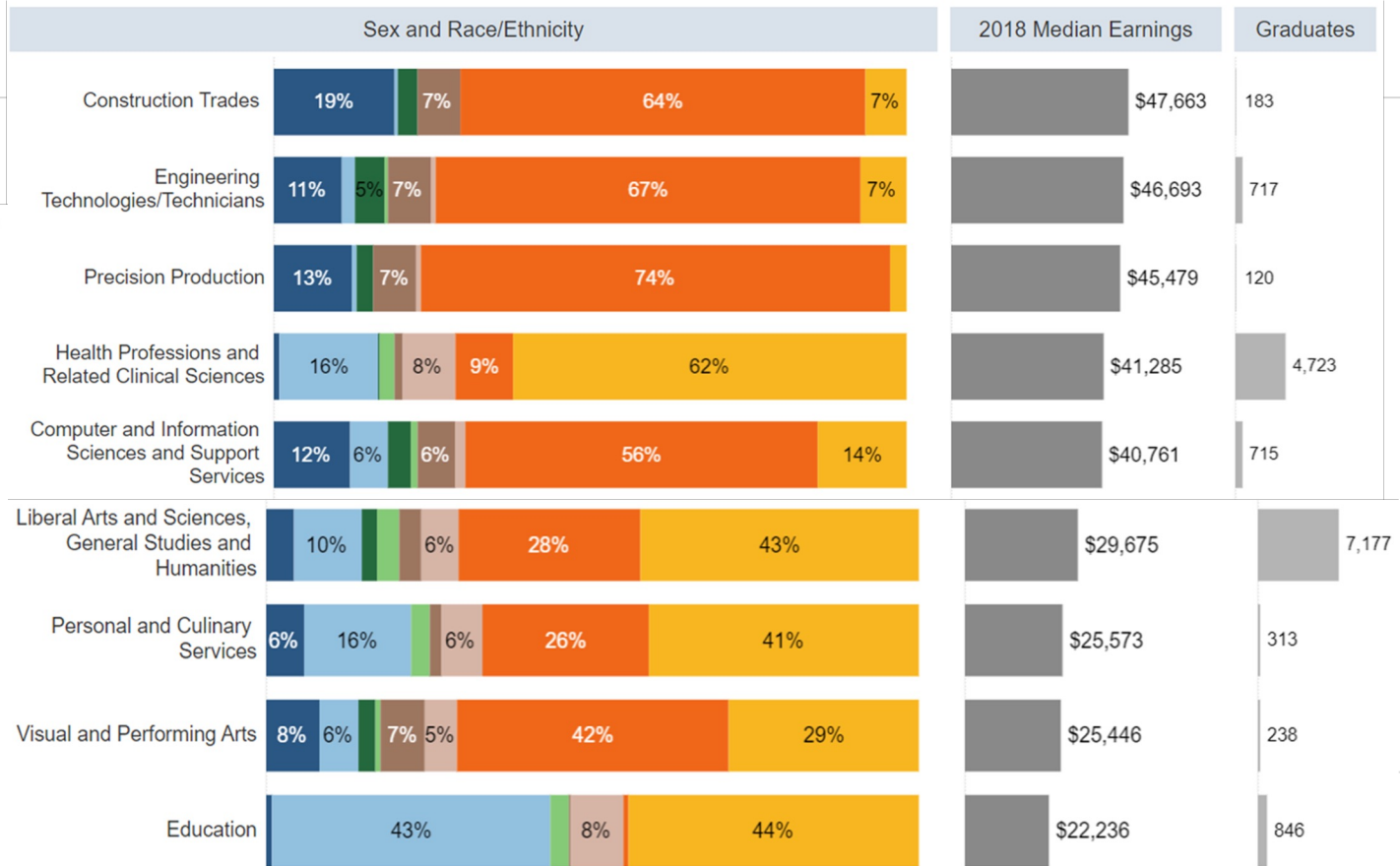
# The Message to Adult Learners is Broken



# Adult educational attainment is not equally distributed by race / ethnicity (2021)



# Equity issues also exist at the program level



Sex and Race/Ethnicity

- White Female
- White Male
- Other/Unkn. Female
- Other/Unkn. Male
- Hispanic Female
- Hispanic Male
- Black Female
- Black Male



# 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



**NC RECONNECT**

- Focus on all adults  
**Adult = Independent FAFSA**
- 15 colleges (expanding to 20)
- Philanthropy-led

# The NC Reconnect Model

Direct outreach to former students

**insidetrack**

Dedicated PR and digital marketing



Grant funding for customized adult learner support



Cohort-based professional development

# Reconnect in Action



**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



TOTAL  
OUTREACH

**21,514**



CONTACT  
RATE

**30.6%**



ENROLLMENT RATE  
FROM CONTACT

**18.66%**



INCREASED  
1 TERM TUITION  
(Fall '21 and Fall '22)

**\$2,122,625**

*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@ncccommunitycolleges.edu