

Initiative To Close Skills Gap Gives Community Colleges Flexibility With Funds

By Administrator

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RALEIGH, (SGRToday.com) - Now that the state's community colleges have saved \$16.8 million, Gov. Pat McCrory is recommending the colleges have the flexibility to put the funds to work for training in high-demand fields. The goal, the governor said on Thursday, is to close the gap between job openings and skills in the labor force.

"This is all about putting North Carolinians in good-paying jobs as soon as possible," the governor said. "More importantly, the decisions on how to invest the funds will be made at the local level to directly connect the training to the area economy." The governor made the announcement at Catawba Valley Community College near Hickory. He was joined by Dr. Scott Ralls, North Carolina Community College System president and Catawba Valley president Dr. Garrett Hinshaw.

According to a statement from the governor's office, under the governor's "Closing the Skills Gap" initiative, each community college will decide how it will invest the money, such as updating equipment or providing salary supplements to faculty. The decision will be based on the needs of the communities and the employers they serve.

The occupations targeted by the community colleges provide local employment opportunities and are in growing industries that pay higher wages. Local employment and skills demand input collected by the community colleges was correlated with data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Another distinction of the "Closing the Skills" program is it will focus on jobs that do not necessarily require graduate or undergraduate degrees. Recent research by the Brookings Institution found that half of the occupations in high-demand STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) don't require a four-year degree and pay an average \$53,000 annual wage. This wage is higher than the average wage in nearly every county served by the state's 58 community colleges.

Targeted Occupations Covered Under "Closing the Skills Gap" Initiative:

Health Sciences

- Nurses

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- Dental Hygienists
- Dental Assistants
- Dental Laboratory Technicians
- Occupational Therapy Assistant
- Physical Therapy Technician/Assistant
- Radiation Therapists
- Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist
- Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians
- Diagnostic Medical Sonographers
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technology/Technician
- Nuclear Medicine Technologists
- Radiologic Technologists
- Surgical Technologists

Biological, Chemical, and Biotechnology

- Biological Technicians
- Chemical Technicians
- Chemical Plant and System Operators
- Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders

Manufacturing, Production, and Installation

- Machinists and Precision Metal Workers
- Heavy/Industrial Equipment Maintenance Technician

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- Medical Equipment Repairers
- Industrial Machine Mechanics
- Machine Maintenance Workers
- Electrical Power-Line Transmission Installers
- Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers

Architecture, Engineering, and Construction

- Aerospace Engineering and Operations Technicians
- Civil Engineering Technicians
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technicians
- Electro-Mechanical Technicians
- Industrial Engineering Technicians
- Mechanical Engineering Technicians
- Nuclear and Industrial Radiologic Technicians
- Architectural and Civil Drafters
- Electrical and Electronics Drafters
- Mechanical Drafters
- Building/Construction Finishing, Management, and Inspection
- Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters
- Electricians
- Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation and Refrigeration Maintenance Technicians
- Construction Equipment Operators and Operating Engineers

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Transportation

- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
- Air Transportation
- Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
- Automotive Body and Related Repairers
- Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
- Avionics Technicians
- Bus and Truck Mechanics
- Diesel Engine Specialists
- Boat Mechanics and Service Technicians
- Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics