

Counties at Work

Transylvania County, North Carolina Case Study

Rashida Brown
Associate Program Director, Children, Youth & Families

Arabella Pluta-Ehlers
Program Manager, Children, Youth & Families



© NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES
RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.

About NACo:

The [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo) **strengthens America's counties**, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- **Advocate county priorities** in federal policymaking;
- **Promote exemplary county policies** and practices;
- **Nurture leadership skills** and expand knowledge networks;
- **Optimize county and taxpayer resources** and cost savings; and
- **Enrich the public's understanding** of county government.

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) is a non-profit organization recognized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 public charity providing education, technical assistance and research to counties. NACoRF's mission is to ascertain, develop and distribute knowledge about county governments and training of public officials, prospective public officials and other interested parties.

About NACo's Landscape Analysis:

In partnership with the [ECMC Foundation](#), NACo conducted a national landscape analysis on counties' role and decision-making authority in post-secondary education. This analysis identified impactful county efforts including directly allocating local funds, pursuing regional and intergovernmental partnerships to leverage federal resources and coordinating post-secondary education systems with county systems, such as health and human services, as well as with local private industry. Such efforts maximize educational and employment opportunities and increase access for residents. Recently, counties have led and supported their post-secondary education institutions in mitigating local challenges related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Through an electronic survey and group and individual interviews, NACo examined how county leaders:

1. Make decisions affecting the post-secondary education sector;
2. Allocate public funding impacting higher education institutions;
3. Create partnerships with the post-secondary education sector to strengthen its connection with other systems; and
4. Work to slow the spread of COVID-19 in post-secondary education settings.

In conjunction with NACo's report ["Counties At Work: Counties Support Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Opportunities for Residents."](#) NACo published a set of case studies sharing county examples and best practices in creating cross-sector partnerships with higher education systems to improve economic resiliency and mobility, workforce preparedness, educational attainment and gainful employment for residents. County leaders representing local colleges and universities, workforce boards and human services agencies participated in a series of interviews with NACo to share their local efforts and best practices. For more information, please contact Rashida Brown, Associate Program Director for Children, Youth and Families at rbrown@naco.org or Arabella Pluta-Ehlers, Program Manager for Children, Youth and Families at aplutaehlers@naco.org.

Counties Support Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Opportunities for Residents

Transylvania County, North Carolina

Interviewees: Jamie Bradenburg, CEO, TVS;; Erin Drew, Executive Director, The Family Place; Laura Leatherwood, President, Blue Ridge Community College; Page Lemel, County Commissioner; Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent for Transylvania County Schools; Shelly Webb, Executive Director, Sharing House

County name, state: Transylvania County, N.C.

Rural, suburban, or urban: Rural

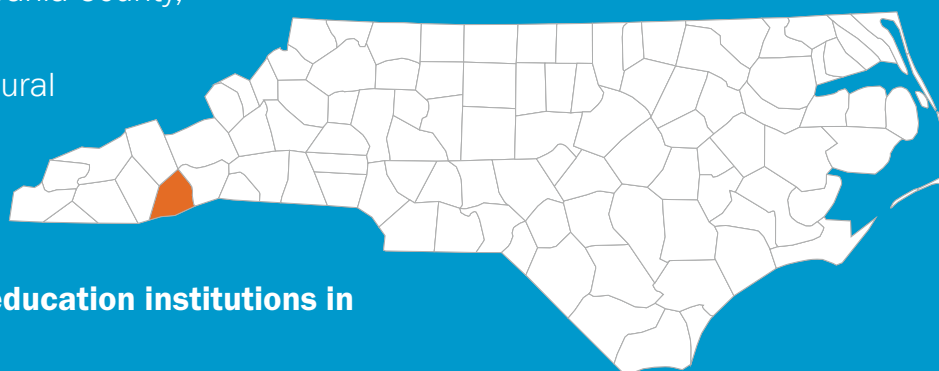
Population: 34,215

Poverty rate: 15.0%

Unemployment rate: 3.8%

Number of post-secondary education institutions in the county: 1

Student enrollment in the county's post-secondary education institutions: 741



About Transylvania County, North Carolina

Located in the mountains of North Carolina and known as the “Land of Waterfalls,” Transylvania County is a small county with a growing summer and winter tourism industry across the Appalachia.¹ The local Brevard Music Center and its festivals and performances attract visitors from across the country. Manufacturing, especially in the advanced materials and food and beverage sectors, is a large and growing industry in the county.

The county role in post-secondary education

The Transylvania County Board of Commissioners is a five-member body of elected officials responsible for setting the county property tax rate, adopting the budget and establishing policy by passing local resolutions and laws.ⁱⁱ While counties in North Carolina do not have a formal decision-making role in post-secondary education, Transylvania County engages and partners with its community college and other local and regional stakeholders to create pathways to post-secondary education and employment. Transylvania County's Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) works with county government and the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board (MAWDB), which serves four counties in the region, to collaborate on higher education programming that meets the needs of today's workforce. The MAWDB shares workforce data with BRCC and other partners to gather input and uses it to expand and improve its workforce development programs.

Transylvania County works with its post-secondary education institutions to develop needs-responsive curricula and provide career development pathways for students interested in local government. In response to a county shortage of social workers, early childhood

educators and teachers, BRCC began offering associate degrees in Human Services Technology and Early Childhood Education, as well as a teacher preparation program.ⁱⁱⁱ BRCC and the county are collaborating on "Grow Your Own" programs, which focus on recruiting and supporting local candidates for teaching and human services careers in the community.^{iv} To support career development for local students, the county's Department of Social Services selects interns from BRCC's Human Services Technology program.

Brevard College also partnered with Get Set Transylvania, a local initiative supported by the Board of Commissioners, county agencies and local non-profits, to create a teacher licensure program in childhood education and Birth-Kindergarten licensure or non-licensure option. Curriculum includes nature-based education, trauma informed practices with training in resiliency, and approaches for working with family and community partners to increase engagement in early childhood development. Students take courses in Environmental Pedagogy, Methods in Early Childhood Development and Elementary Education, Theory and Practice of Experiential Education, and Nature-Based Early Childhood Curriculum.^v Recognizing the need for the county to expand a high-quality early care and education



“[Blue Ridge Community College] is very much integrated – we keep in touch with the county, we talk to them about economic development and workforce needs. We bring them to the table. We’re very much in lockstep with what they’re doing and where we’re headed.”

- Dr. Laura B. Leatherwood, President of Blue Ridge Community College

workforce, Get Set Transylvania developed a partnership with Sesame Street in Communities (SSIC) to connect over 24 local organizations to SSIC’s professional development and training for early educators.^{vi}

Funding for post-secondary education institutions and programming

Transylvania County’s budget for fiscal years 2020-2021 was \$59.7 million.^{vii} In North Carolina, counties are responsible for funding the local community college’s physical plant, which includes maintenance of plant facilities and supports expansions and renovations. In collaboration with Transylvania County government, BRCC created a strategic plan for its educational programming and campus operations to match the county’s future workforce needs. To help retain faculty, Transylvania County provides BRCC’s instructors with a local supplement of 5% of their salary. BRCC also receives federal funds to support literacy education and based on enrollment, uses state funds to support programming and operations at its two campuses.



Coordination and collaboration for improved workforce outcomes

Transylvania County government, non-profit organizations and BRCC partner to strengthen career pathways for residents and remove barriers to employment. The local NCWorks office, which connects job seekers to career readiness resources, is located on BRCC’s Transylvania County campus. NCWorks is funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds and serves as a co-located and integrated one-stop workforce service center that provides residents with job search assistance and connects them to BRCC’s education and training programs.

Sharing House, a local non-profit entity that serves individuals in crisis, refers residents to county-based services and connects them to NCWorks to help meet their employment needs. In addition to providing food, clothing and financial assistance, Sharing House operates the Getting Ahead program, where students can earn their General Educational Development (GED) or enroll in post-secondary education.^{viii} Sharing House also addresses transportation barriers in the county through its Wheels to Work program. The program offers residents in need with donated cars, allowing them to travel to their job or attend higher education and workforce training courses.

Transylvania Vocational Services (TVS) and the Reentry program are working with county residents experiencing challenges in seeking and obtaining employment, such as people with disabilities and returning citizens. TVS works closely with the county's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to support individuals with disabilities, connecting them to employment and training opportunities. The Reentry program, a collaboration among the Transylvania County Sheriff's Office, BRCC and local non-profit organizations, supports returning citizens by connecting them to resources that help them transition back into society. These individuals may be connected to BRCC to pursue their GED or receive support from community-based organizations to identify potential employers and seek job placements.^{ix}

To help mitigate employment barriers attributed to lack of child care, non-profit organizations and Transylvania County provide an array of supplementary supports. Several non-profit organizations provide eligible low-income parents with child care subsidies as they seek and maintain jobs and training for long-term careers. For families who do not qualify for child care subsidies, the Family Place, a local non-profit organization, operates play and parenting groups. Through these groups, families can socialize and learn about additional resources that meet their needs, such as child care supports and early intervention services. These groups also target bilingual families, foster parents and families experiencing homelessness.^x

To support 3-to 4-year-old children with early care and education, the county administers state-funded Pre-K programs and other early childhood development services through the Smart Start program. Early childhood development programs offer a two-generational approach for supporting parents as they work, seek employment or obtain post-secondary education and training while their children receive high-quality early care and education to be school ready. The county's secondary education institutions also leverage BRCC's services to support working families and those seeking higher education. Students at Davidson River School, an alternative public high school, may seek BRCC enrollment to learn a trade or receive skills training upon graduating from high school.

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 in post-secondary education settings

Transylvania County's public health department and educational institution leaders regularly communicate to discuss strategies and protocols for slowing the spread

“We work with every single agency in the county... these partnerships are what makes our program sustainable. Without it we're just an island and we're not making any headway.”

– Barbara Grimm, Principal at Davidson River School

of the coronavirus (COVID-19). During the pandemic, BRCC continued its programs for nursing aides, surgical technicians, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, recognizing the critical need for a sustainable medical workforce in the county. However, the college used standard COVID-19 health and safety precautions to keep students safe in in-person learning environments. Moreover, the college provided personal protective equipment for students working and being trained in local hospital settings. BRCC transitioned its lecture-based courses to online learning and is working with local health departments across five counties to conduct contract tracing for the students returning to campus. To increase access to remote education, BRCC offers a program for students struggling with broadband access or who have technology needs where they can check out a laptop and a WiFi hotspot for as long as they need.

Conclusion

In Transylvania County, BRCC coordinates with the regional workforce development board and other stakeholders to understand workforce trends and create programs that prepare residents for high demand jobs. County government works with BRCC and local non-profit organizations to leverage a variety of creative approaches for increasing residents' access to workforce and post-secondary education opportunities. These partnerships help to remove barriers for residents and promote a strong local economy. The county's public health department also partners with educational institutions to help slow the spread of COVID-19 on college campuses.

Endnotes

ⁱ Transylvania Economic Alliance. (n.d.). *Target Markets*. http://transylvaniatimes.com/target_markets

ⁱⁱ Transylvania County. (n.d.). *How Counties Work*. <https://www.transylvaniacounty.org/how-counties-work>

ⁱⁱⁱ Blue Ridge Community College. (n.d.). *Human Services Program*. <https://www.blueridge.edu/programs-courses/human-services/human-services-cu/>

^{iv} Zuber, T. and Berg-Jacobson, A. (2017, March 4). *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce through Grow Your Own: A Snapshot of Three Programs*. Center on Great Teachers & Leaders. <https://gtlcenter.org/blog/diversifying-teacher-workforce-through-grow-your-own-snapshot-three-programs>

^v Brevard College. (2018). *New Academic Program announced at Brevard College: Teacher Licensure Program in Childhood Education with an Early Childhood Concentration*. <https://brevard.edu/new-academic-program-announced-teacher-licensure-program-in-childhood-education/>

^{vi} Sesame Street in Communities. (n.d.). *Professional Development*. <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/professional-development/>

^{vii} The Transylvania Times. (2020, June 8). *County Budget Public Hearing Set for Today-Brevard NC*. <https://www.transylvaniatimes.com/story/2020/06/08/news/county-budget-public-hearing-set-for-today-brevard-nc/45202.html>

^{viii} Sharing House. (n.d.). *Getting Ahead in Transylvania County!* <https://www.sharinghouse.org/getting-ahead>

^{ix} The Family Place. (2019, June 14). *Reentry*. <https://www.thefamilyplacenc.com/postings/reentry>

^x The Family Place. (n.d.). *In-House Programs*. <https://www.thefamilyplacenc.com/programs>

 [FB.COM/NACODC](https://www.facebook.com/NACODC)

 [TWITTER.COM/NACOTWEETS](https://twitter.com/NACOTWEETS)

 [YOUTUBE.COM/NACOVVIDEO](https://www.youtube.com/NACOVVIDEO)

 www.NACo.ORG/LINKEDIN

660 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, NW
SUITE 400 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001
202.393.6226 • WWW.NACO.ORG



© NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES
RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.