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# COMMUNITY FORUMS REPORT

# 2024

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LEARN. ENGAGE. BELONG.





# AN OVERVIEW

Sandhills Community College is deeply committed to serving the educational and economic needs of our community. As part of our ongoing efforts to remain responsive and adaptive, we engaged community members throughout Moore and Hoke Counties in a series of forums to gather their insight and to inform our new *College Strategic Plan of Operations*. The 2024 Community Forums were designed to provide a platform for open dialogue, thus enabling us to identify areas of weakness, uncover potential growth opportunities, and ensure we are effectively meeting the needs of all we serve.

The forums brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including students, local business leaders, community members, and faculty and staff. Through facilitated discussions and interactive sessions, participants shared their perspectives on various aspects of the College's programs, services, and overall community impact. This collaborative approach allowed us to gather valuable insight into the strengths and challenges faced by our institution, as well as explore innovative, "big ideas" for future development.

This report summarizes the key findings from these community forums. It highlights the major themes that emerged from the discussions, outlines the identified improvement areas, and presents actionable recommendations for addressing the community's needs. By closely analyzing forum feedback, we aim to enhance our *College Strategic Plan of Operations* and ensure our initiatives are aligned with the aspirations and expectations of our community.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants for their candid input and engagement. These contributions are instrumental in guiding us towards a future where we thrive as a cornerstone of education and opportunity in our Sandhills region. Learn. Engage. Belong.

We thank you.





## FORUMS AT A GLANCE

2

### Counties

Individuals came together across locations in both Hoke and Moore Counties.

12

### Opportunities

A total of eleven events were held throughout April 2024. An additional survey was provided to faculty and staff who were unable to attend in person.

9

### Local Partnerships

The community welcomed the SCC forums by offering their churches, businesses, restaurants, etc. as gathering places.

285

### Participants

Over the course of the forums, approximately 285 total community members came together.

# TOP FIVE FINDINGS

## 1. COMMUNITY IMPACT

The community values Sandhills Community College, as it significantly impacts the community, citizens, and businesses through various initiatives, programs, and trainings. Overall, the College plays a vital role in enhancing educational opportunities, economic development, and community engagement within the local community and beyond.



# TOP FIVE FINDINGS

## 2. MARKETING & OUTREACH

The community loves what the College does but does not always feel informed. Improved marketing strategies are needed to reach a wider audience and better circulate information.

## 3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH EXTENSION COURSES

The community wants more of the College embedded within the community. The need for college courses and trainings offered at community locations was noted at nearly every forum.

Many participants expressed a desire for more accessible educational opportunities that cater to the unique needs of the local population

## 4. INNOVATIVE, FLEXIBLE, AND ACCESSIBLE PROGRAM & TRAINING OFFERINGS

Community members recognize the need to review current programs and trainings and determine if all are reflective of current community and industry needs.

Additionally, the community noted the need to provide greater flexibility in course and training offerings, including later afternoon, night, and weekend courses, as well as a consistent rotation of courses at varied locations.



# TOP FIVE FINDINGS

## 5. CURRENT BARRIERS TO FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The community consistently identified common barriers and recognized each as a potential opportunity for the College to tackle in future planning.

- **Childcare** was mentioned a total of 10 times throughout the community discussions. The concern relates to *both available and affordable* childcare. A lack of childcare is often a barrier when those interested in attending college have no viable childcare options.
- **Transportation** was noted as a barrier throughout the discussions and especially in Hoke and Northern Moore. A lack of gasoline funding and/or a reliable vehicle are true concerns for those interested in participating in college courses or activities but live a distance from the College.



- The lack of a **skilled workforce pipeline** was expressed by both faculty/staff and community members. Faculty and staff note in certain areas (e.g., automotive, healthcare fields, etc.) recruiting and retaining interested students is difficult.

Community members and business owners note that finding skilled workers in these same fields is as equally difficult.

- Emerging and easily accessible **Artificial Intelligence** (AI) technology was expressed as a major concern by faculty and staff. Concerns note that AI is changing the landscape of higher education and the College must determine methods to adapt and operate within this new landscape.

# BIG IDEAS



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

- Share wins with the community, including **success stories!** Emphasize programs and what is happening on campus. The community wants to know!
- **Utilize the community to spread the word** about the College through community ambassadors, churches, local organizations, community events, email blasts, flyers, and local radio stations.
- **Destigmatize community college** and the trades by:
  - Communicating the opportunities and wages available in the trade fields.
  - Providing more comprehensive, interactive “behind the scenes” tours for individuals to experience various programs and trades and explore options that excite them.
- **Engage our seniors** by:
  - Partnering with senior centers to offer classes within the community.
  - Creating **senior learning communities** or cohorts to engage seniors with travel groups, culinary arts, music programs, and other consistent meeting opportunities.
- Celebrate our **unique campus and community.**



# BIG IDEAS



## COMMUNITY & BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS



- Partner with local businesses to provide employee **trainings**, establish employee **scholarships**, and create **paid apprenticeships** for students.
  - Encourage faculty and staff to join **professional associations** and **community engagement organizations** to make connections and establish affiliations with local community, regional, state, and national partners.
- Explore further partnerships with the **Small Business Center**.
  - Connect **students to employers** with specific positions/occupations in mind.
  - Build more **specific program partnerships** with transfer institutions such as UNC Pembroke and St. Andrews.

## INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESSIBILITY

- Build **consistent, affordable transportation networks** between Hoke and Moore Counties, to include evening options.
- Utilize the campus more **after hours** by offering late afternoon and evenings courses along with Saturday academies.
- Offer more courses at the Hoke Center; consider making the Hoke Center the **Hoke Campus**.
- Ensure all **college literature is translated** into other languages, especially Spanish.
- Research ways to partner with local businesses to provide **affordable residential options** for students.
- Integrate **sustainability initiatives** into the workplace to promote environment stewardship and responsibility. Create a "green campus" by installing solar panels and research more energy efficient practices along with additional recycling practices, which speak to younger generations.



# BIG IDEAS



## PROGRAM, EXTENSION, & COURSE OFFERINGS

- Incorporate **VR technology** for the entire campus, using the library as a hub.
- Design and offer **language classes** for **educators**.
- Create **small engine repair** courses.
- Open a **substance abuse counseling** program at the Hoke Center.
- Reestablish **high school equivalency** programs (e.g., GED® or HiSET®) at the **local prisons**.



- Partner with high schools to offer high school equivalency classes at the high schools; provide services to students who are not doing well, to include **dropout prevention programs**.
- Develop a comprehensive **cyber security range** where students can develop and enhance real-world, job-ready skills in an interactive, safe, and isolated environment.
- Offer **specialty healthcare trainings** in dementia care, mental health, and brain injury care.
- Provide specific business courses (e.g., tax preparation) to **local farmers**.
- Connect with local the **equine communities** to offer various certifications in barn management and/or animal care.

## SUPPORT & RESOURCES

- Focus on improving **student completion rates** by utilizing guided pathways for programs and implement **Learn, Engage, Belong strategies** to retain students.
- Provide recent high school graduates with services/resources focused on **career planning and life skills** (e.g., oil changes, basic home repairs, budgeting).
- **Support families** through various programs:
  - Young mothers, new mothers, prenatal, Lamaze, and lactation trainings
  - Afterschool-structured opportunities across the counties
  - On-campus childcare (<5 years old) support for students during class hours
  - “What to expect” presentations for parents of college-age children
  - Childcare trainings for church nursery volunteers
  - Parenting classes that meet court-ordered requirements
- Create a deeper connection with the **military-affiliated organizations**.

# ACKNOWLEDGING

*our friends*

We extend our gratitude to those who contributed venues for the community forums:

*Homegrown Restaurant*

*NC Cooperative Extension Center of Moore County*

*Northern Moore Family Resource Center*

*Raeford First Baptist Church*

*Robert A. Wright Hoke County Agricultural Center*

*Seven Lakes Baptist Church*

*Sunrise Theater*

*AV and Staff of Bradshaw Performing Arts Center*

*Trinity A.M.E. Zion Church*

*Whispering Pines Community Center*

Your generosity and support played a crucial role in making these events successful!



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3395 AIRPORT ROAD  
PINEHURST NC 28374  
[WWW.SANDHILLS.EDU](http://WWW.SANDHILLS.EDU)