

WILSON 2020 YOUTH MASTER PLAN

(Wilson County)

PROGRAM PROFILE

“We want our best and brightest committed to this region.”

— Wilson educator

“We need to figure out what is working and do more of that.”

— Wilson County employer



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What Is the Wilson 2020 Youth Master Plan?

In 2014, stakeholders in Wilson County developed a comprehensive master plan to improve life outcomes for local youth. Participating stakeholders included educators, parents, community members, nonprofits, businesses, churches, law enforcement, and government agencies. The groups identified five key interrelated areas for focus — K-12 Academic Achievement, Safety, Out-of-School Time, Education and Workforce, and Health and Wellness. Wilson Forward, a community capacity-building organization, is charged with evaluating and communicating the progress toward the Youth Master Plan’s goals.



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Who Are the Partners and What Are Their Roles?

- **Wilson Forward:** Serves as a backbone organization for the Youth Master Plan.
- **Wilson County Schools:** Focuses on providing a safe environment while giving students the skills they need for success in the future.
- **Wilson Community College:** Works with employers and other institutions of learning to offer coordinated programming that responds to the labor needs of the workforce.
- **Barton College:** Offers postsecondary learning opportunities.
- **Local Employers:** Engages in educational programming and provides academic and non-academic program supports.
- **Wilson County Public Health Department:** Places health centers on school grounds.



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How Does the Program Work?

The Youth Master Planning process began with a landscape mapping survey to identify the resources and resource gaps that existed in Wilson County to support youth. From there, planners identified five interrelated areas for focus: K-12 Academic Achievement, Safety, Out-of-School Time, Education and Workforce, and Health and Wellness. The Youth Master Plan lists 16 desired outcomes across the five focus areas, along with specific goals. The plan could help to reduce Wilson County’s high school dropout rate, which, at 10.1 percent, is more than twice the state average (4.6 percent), and ultimately



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increase the number of high school graduates who go on to attain bachelor's, graduate, or professional degrees (see **Figure 1**).

There has been a significant number of new programs launched as a result of the Master Plan, including the well-regarded Wilson Applied Technology Academy. Below, two of the new programs are described.

A Gentleman's Agreement

In 2014, student achievement in Wilson County Schools ranked in the bottom quartile of North Carolina public schools, and there were significant disparities based on race. The achievement rates for African-American males were particularly troubling. The community recognized that without a focus on equity, they would not make the progress they desired. See **Figure 2** for details on educational attainment by race and ethnicity in the county.

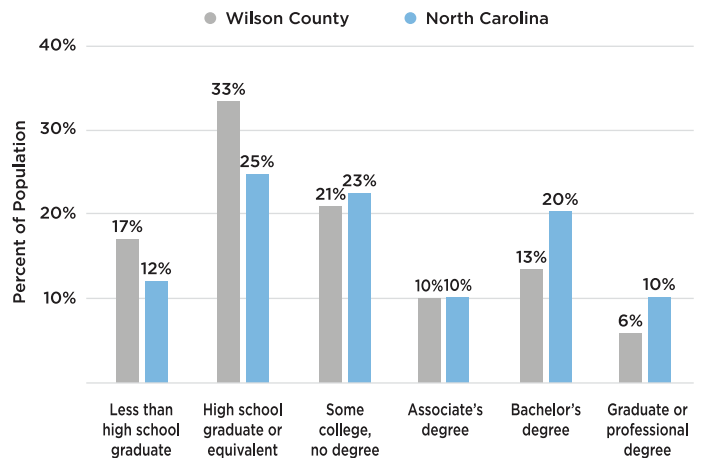
To help reach the goal of having 100 percent of high school students prepared to succeed after graduation, the school system partnered with for-profit and nonprofit community organizations to launch A Gentleman's Agreement.

The program focuses on male African-American high school students. Participant numbers are kept intentionally small — approximately 25 per school — to ensure a robust experience. With the help of faith-based and other community-based organizations, law enforcement, and local businesses, the program offers five components: academic supports, individual mentorship, experiences leading to cultural and postsecondary educational exposure, parental engagement, and an end-of-year celebration. Students enter the program during ninth grade. The program recruits students who may be struggling academically but show potential for peer leadership. The theory is that if these students become focused on academic achievement, they will influence others who are not in the program to become similarly focused.

The program outcomes have been impressive. Of the first graduating cohort, all pursued some form of postsecondary education, with one student receiving a full academic scholarship to Winston-Salem State University. Intermediate outcomes include increased attendance, decreased suspensions, and improved academic performance. Word of the program has spread quickly. Last year, Wilson County Schools presented on A Gentleman's Agreement at the National School Boards Association Conference.

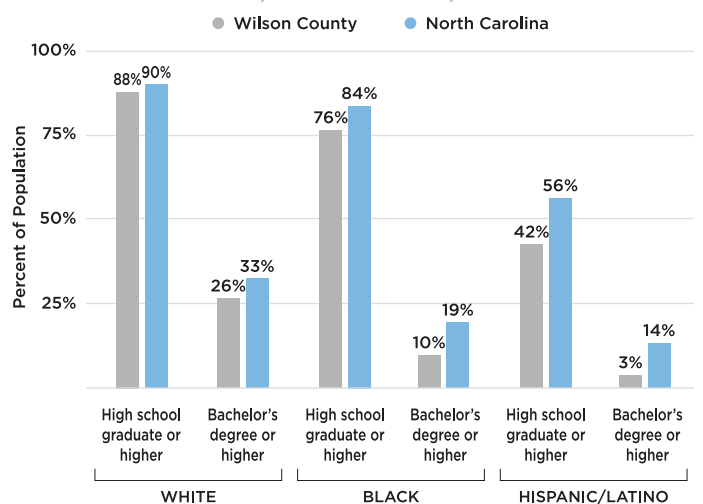
The program is possible because of the broad community support it enjoys. Local companies conduct workshops and donate food for meetings. One company secured tickets for a trip to the Durham Performing Arts Center. Others helped with a visit to the

FIG. 1: WILSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
(Ages 25–64)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012–2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

FIG. 2: WILSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
(by Race and Ethnicity)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012–2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.



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National Museum of African-American History in Washington, D.C. And when the young men needed proper attire for an event, one local store gave each of them a shirt and tie. In terms of supporting the students after graduation, Barton College and Wilson Community College have committed to presenting a full scholarship to one graduating senior each year.

A Gentleman's Agreement is now expanding to six middle schools and five elementary schools. In addition, the school system has launched a companion program for African-American girls: Her PRIDE, which stands for Positivity, Respect, Intelligence, Determination, and Excellence.

Health Centers in Schools

The Wilson County community is working to bridge the gap between education and health. Community members have focused on data demonstrating that (1) children perform better academically when they are healthy and (2) high rates of absenteeism are a predictor for low academic achievement. As a response, they have focused their efforts on creating community-supported school-based health centers. In 2017, they opened the first on-campus health center at a middle school. In 2018, they expanded to one high school. Telemedicine will be used, when feasible, to allow staff to care for patients at either site.

For the 2017-18 school year, 325 Forest Hills Middle School students were enrolled at the Wilson Area Student Health Center. That's about 60 percent of the school's total student population. Teachers also used the services.

Registered nurses and a nurse practitioner staff the centers. In addition to being able to handle common bumps and bruises, as well as required physicals for athletics, the health centers provide close observations of students with chronic diseases, such as asthma and diabetes. They are also able to sometimes diagnose problems that go beyond illness. For example, it turned out that a child who presented with a stomachache was actually facing chronic hunger. The health center was able to refer the child to a nonprofit program that feeds children on the weekend.

The health centers seek to keep children in the classroom, rather than see them sitting in a doctor's office or at home waiting for appointments for medical matters that are not serious. The school-based health centers have been made possible through the Healthcare Foundation of Wilson, which recently awarded the health department a \$175,000 grant that will continue to fund the center at Forest Hills Middle School and the new one at Beddingfield High School.

Surprisingly, the centers have had minimal impact on absenteeism, but tardiness has improved dramatically.

What Is the Governance Structure?

Wilson Forward has a board of directors numbering 24. Half of the members are elected and half serve in an ex officio capacity. The board meets six times a year. A smaller executive committee meets in the months in which the full board does not meet. The executive director works closely with partner organizations to carry out programs, track data, and host community conversations.



Is the Program Data Driven?

Wilson Forward tracks activities toward desired community outcomes and community-level indicators. There are early efforts to also track program data. For example, A Gentleman's Agreement tracks academic achievement and leadership activity of participants in high school. The program also documents when participants begin postsecondary education. Similarly, the schools with health centers track attendance, tardiness, and academic achievement.

What Are the Indicators of Success?

A Gentleman's Agreement has sent 100 percent of its graduating participants on to college or to careers requiring further training, such as at the firefighter academy or in the military. The health centers are a newer innovation. As such, it is too early to know what effect they will have on academic achievement, and while there has been minimal change in absenteeism thus far, they have reduced tardiness at the middle school. Another immediate benefit is that students are likely to be healthier if center staff successfully encourage them to participate in school-sponsored physical activities.

What Is the Promise of the Strategy for Increasing Educational Attainment in North Carolina?

A Gentleman's Agreement and school-based health centers are both programs seeking to solve particular challenges. In many school systems, African-American males are not reaching their full potential. While the program is labor intensive, it is showing significant promise with young men who did not appear to be on a college-ready track in the ninth grade. Similarly, given the emerging focus on the serious effects of absenteeism on academic achievement, school-based centers are an intervention to watch.

