

# How Does the East Compare to the Rest of North Carolina?

by Joanne Scharer

*Eastern North Carolina has long been thought of as less developed, more agrarian, and more impoverished than the Piedmont or western regions of the state, but how does the region really stack up? In this article, the Center takes a hard look at the latest available data on population, unemployment rates, income, poverty, literacy, and education levels. Our findings? Though the gap is less than one might expect based on image alone, Eastern North Carolina clearly is behind both the Piedmont and the west on a number of different indicators. Population growth in the East is the weakest of the three regions, though the East is growing overall. Indeed, the 2000 U.S. Census finds only three North Carolina counties—Bertie, Edgecombe, and Washington—to have lost population during the decade of the 1990s. All are in Eastern North Carolina. That's an improvement over the 1980s, when 19 North Carolina counties lost population, and 14 of those were in the East, but the new figures still show that most of the state's weakest counties in terms of population growth are in Eastern North Carolina.*

*As was also true in the 1980s, some of the decade's biggest winners in population growth in the 1990s are Eastern counties along the coast, which helped to boost the overall growth rate. Other areas of strong growth include Pitt County, home of East Carolina University, and Harnett, and Hoke counties, which are affected by growth around military installations. Still, the region's overall growth rate of 16.1 percent ranks well below the state growth rate of 21.4 percent.*

*Average unemployment rates for eastern counties, at 5.5 percent, are higher than the state average of 3.6 percent and exceed the average unemployment rates for the Piedmont and mountain counties. Manufacturing jobs are disappearing at a faster clip than in the industrialized Piedmont, though not as fast as in the mountain region. These are generally being replaced by lower-paying service-sector jobs.*

*Per capita income and wages are also lower in the East than either the Piedmont or the West, and the poverty rate is dramatically higher. Eastern North Carolina counties had the lowest average per capita income of any region in the state in 1989 at \$13,505. The East was still the poorest region of the state from a per capita income standpoint 10 years later in 1999, when per capita income reached \$20,536. Indeed, per capita income is 22 percent higher in the Piedmont (\$25,088) and 9 percent higher in the mountain region of the state (\$22,409).*

*At 17.6 percent, the average poverty rate for eastern counties greatly exceeds the North Carolina average of 12.6 percent and the U.S. average of 13.3 percent. The statistics for individual counties within the region, however, vary greatly. Tyrrell County has the highest poverty rate in the region at 25.7 percent while Dare County has the lowest at 8.1 percent.*

*Eastern North Carolina also lags the state as a whole in terms of education. As a region, the East has the lowest levels of literacy in the state. The East also lags the other two regions of the state in the percentage of residents with high school and college degrees, and the region's high school dropout rate is the highest of the state's three regions as well. The 1999–2000 statewide dropout rate was 6.43. The school systems in the eastern counties had an average dropout rate of 6.85—higher than the state average and the highest of the three regions. The Piedmont counties' average also was higher than the state average at 6.55, while mountain counties had the lowest average and were lower than the state at 6.04. The East's network of community colleges for providing job training appears to be solid, though its relative low standing in education means more must be done in work force preparedness.*

*Despite making progress on a number of fronts, the East lags the rest of the state on almost every indicator. North Carolina enjoyed a period of robust growth during the 1990s, and in some ways the East merely looked poorer by comparison. On the whole, the region has failed to close the gap on the rest of the state.*

**I**n early August 1900, while looking for a place to try out their ideas in aviation, Orville and Wilbur Wright of Dayton, Ohio, received a letter from William Tate of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. "If you decide to try your machine here and come, I will take pleasure in doing all I can for your convenience and success and pleasure, and I assure you you will find a hospitable people when you come among us," wrote Tate. Because of the welcome reception and the assistance of the people of coastal North Carolina, Orville Wright made the first successful flight at Kitty Hawk on December 17, 1903.<sup>1</sup>

The first flight may have represented the greatest single moment in the history of Eastern North Carolina since the first English settlers set foot on Roanoke Island in 1585. The achievement on the windswept dunes of North Carolina's easternmost shore heralded huge advances in aviation, transportation, and communication. Yet one could argue that nearly 100 years after this historic event, the region that was truly first in flight, Eastern North

Carolina, is still struggling to get off the ground economically. "Eastern North Carolina has some of the same problems or opportunities as the western part of the state," says Wayne Daves, executive director of policy and workforce development for the state's Workforce Development Commission. "However, Eastern North Carolina is more rural, the counties are larger with more land mass, and there are fewer employment opportunities," adds Daves.

Likewise, the final report of the state's Rural Prosperity Task Force, a group established by former Governor Jim Hunt, N.C. House Speaker Jim Black, and Senate President Pro-Tem Marc Basnight in July 1999 to address the needs in rural areas of the state, declared, "North Carolina's diversity is its strength—and its challenge. Rural North Carolinians living near urban centers face a different set of challenges than those in more remote locations. Communities in the mountains face a different geographical challenge than those surrounded by wetlands."<sup>2</sup> Besides some of the inherent differences of Eastern North Carolina, many of the counties down east are struggling to rebuild after the devastation caused by Hurricane Floyd in September of 1999.

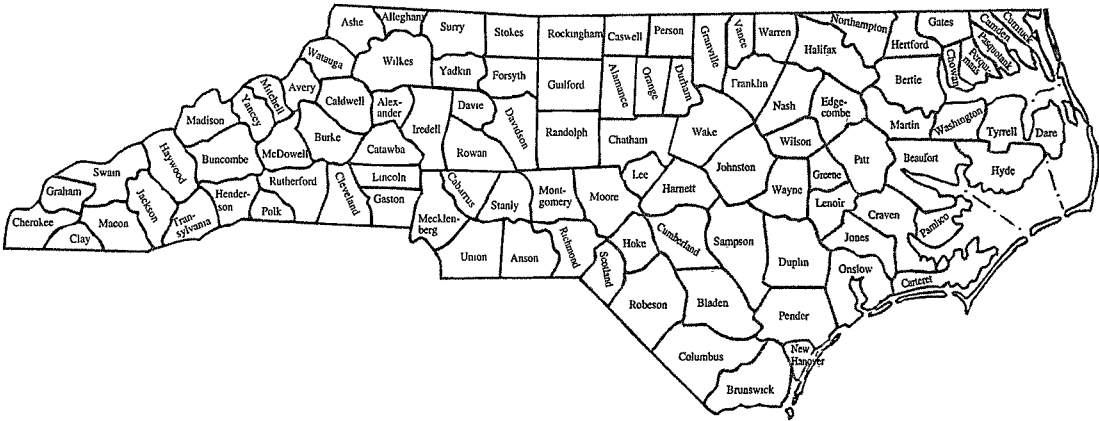
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*Joanne Scharer is a public policy consultant living in Durham, N.C.*



Karen Tam

**Table 1. The Counties of Eastern North Carolina**



- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Beaufort    | 21. Hyde        |
| 2. Bertie      | 22. Johnston    |
| 3. Bladen      | 23. Jones       |
| 4. Brunswick   | 24. Lenoir      |
| 5. Camden      | 25. Martin      |
| 6. Carteret    | 26. Nash        |
| 7. Chowan      | 27. New Hanover |
| 8. Columbus    | 28. Northampton |
| 9. Craven      | 29. Onslow      |
| 10. Cumberland | 30. Pamlico     |
| 11. Currituck  | 31. Pasquotank  |
| 12. Dare       | 32. Pender      |
| 13. Duplin     | 33. Perquimans  |
| 14. Edgecombe  | 34. Pitt        |
| 15. Gates      | 35. Robeson     |
| 16. Greene     | 36. Sampson     |
| 17. Halifax    | 37. Scotland    |
| 18. Harnett    | 38. Tyrrell     |
| 19. Hertford   | 39. Washington  |
| 20. Hoke       | 40. Wayne       |
|                | 41. Wilson      |

With such contrasts in mind, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research decided to analyze a number of social and economic variables to bring into focus the opportunities and challenges facing the 41 counties of the North Carolina coastal plain. This article examines population growth, unemployment rates, income, poverty, literacy, and education levels, with the intent of highlighting some of the region's strengths and pinpointing areas in which it may need to improve.<sup>3</sup>

## THE NUMBERS

### Population Growth

Nearly 2.4 million (2,389,225) people live in the counties that comprise Eastern North Carolina. The population in these counties has grown 16.1 percent since 1990, compared to a statewide growth rate of 21.4 percent.<sup>4</sup> Population growth may be thought of as an indirect proxy for regional or county economic conditions. Presumably, people will migrate from areas of economic decline to areas of economic prosperity so that a relatively high population growth generally indicates a flourishing local economy. Though the eastern part of the state lacks some of the wealth and amenities of the Piedmont, its residents like their quality of life, and the region is growing (see Eastern North Carolina: A Diverse Collection of People and Places, pp. 17-19).

The growth rate for the region is buoyed by explosive growth in five coastal counties (Brunswick, Currituck, Dare, New Hanover, and Pender) and two counties affected by growth of military bases (Hoke and Harnett counties near the Army's Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base). Each of these counties experienced growth in excess of 30 percent, and in three cases, the growth exceeded 40 percent. Meanwhile, the three North Carolina counties that lost population in the 1990s—Bertie, Edgecombe, and Washington counties—are all located in the East.

### Employment

Many of North Carolina's 100 counties are facing the transition from a low-skilled local manufacturing economy to a technology-based global economy. And some eastern counties have never developed much of a manufacturing base to begin with, continuing to rely primarily on agriculture. The result is higher unemployment rates for the region than for the state as a whole.

A county's unemployment rate reflects the economic condition of that county by indicating what percent of the county's labor force currently is out of work and therefore without a steady income. A high unemployment rate in any one year may be the result of a plant closing, while chronically high unemployment may mean that there is a greater need for job development. Statewide, the 2000 average unemployment rate hovered at 3.6 percent.<sup>5</sup> In the eastern counties, the 2000 average unemployment rate was notably higher at 5.5 percent, ranging from 2.2 percent in Johnston County to 10.6 percent in Columbus County and 9.7 percent in Tyrrell County (see Table 2). Unemployment in the Piedmont and mountain counties was lower at 3.8 and 4.6 percent respectively. Because unemployment rates vary from year to year, the Center used N.C. Employment Security Commission data to calculate an average unemployment rate for the years 1990-2000. Again, the rate was highest in the East, at 6.1 percent, compared to 5.1 percent for the mountain counties and 4.4 percent for the Piedmont.

The number of jobs in North Carolina increased by 28 percent from 1989 to 1999.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the average change in employment for the counties in the eastern part of the state was 26 percent during that same period. While employment grew overall, all regions in the state experienced declining employment in the manufacturing sector. However, the state's loss (-7.5 percent) was not as great as the loss of manufacturing employment in Eastern North Carolina counties (-10.3 percent). The Piedmont counties fared best with less than a 3.3 percent average loss in manufacturing employment, while the mountain counties suffered most severely with an average manufacturing employment loss of 12.4 percent.

The latest data, as well as anecdotal evidence, indicate that the loss of manufacturing jobs continues apace, with textile and apparel production jobs moving offshore and tobacco manufacturing jobs disappearing altogether. These changes appear to have hit Eastern North Carolina particularly hard. In Robeson County, where the 2000 jobless rate averaged 9.0 percent, more than 1,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in 2000 alone, according to press accounts maintained in a data base by the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina. These included the loss of 240 jobs in Saint Pauls due to the closing of Carolina Mills Plant #25, which manufactured yarn, and the closing of an apparel manufacturer, Gerber Children's Wear Inc., costing 360 jobs in Lumberton.



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Noah Woods, a Robeson County commissioner and second vice president of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, notes that high unemployment is forcing county residents to upgrade their skills. "Right now, there is a correlation with the higher unemployment rates and increased enrollment at the community college (Robeson County Community College)," says Woods. "People are enrolling to retrain and retool themselves so they can get jobs. Higher unemployment is forcing a lot of people who didn't have technical skills to get those."

While manufacturing employment decreased across the state, employment in the services sector increased by nearly two-thirds—64 percent. In the East, services employment grew by nearly 115,000 jobs, or 70 percent. The Piedmont and the western

regions experienced similar growth. The increase in service sector employment reflects the move from more labor intensive and sometimes higher paying manufacturing jobs to service jobs. While some jobs in the service industry (such as accounting or computer programming) pay high wages and require advanced skills, others are low paying and offer limited opportunity. Furthermore, most of the higher-paying jobs tend to cluster around already developed and more economically stable urban areas.<sup>7</sup> The state's population growth and growing economy brought an increase in construction industry jobs over the last decade. In fact, construction industry employment grew at a faster rate in Eastern North Carolina (45 percent) than it did in the state as a whole (39 percent) and even outpaced the burgeoning Piedmont (38 percent).

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***I come into the silent, small town  
As quietly as memory. It is a cross of streets  
Nailed once through the heart by a stoplight.***

—JAMES APPLEWHITE  
"THE GIFT"



With a higher unemployment rate, Eastern North Carolina's employment statistics may be less promising than other regions in the state. However, economic development officials see a silver lining to higher unemployment at a time when many counties in the state are having difficulty filling jobs with qualified people. "We still have a relatively high unemployment rate compared to the rest of the state," says Leonard Kulick, marketing director for North Carolina Eastern Region (formerly the Global TransPark Regional Partnership), one of the state's seven regional economic development partnerships. "As far as Eastern North Carolina is concerned, that's a very positive thing," adds Kulick, who believes that companies in need of workers will find an ample supply in Eastern North Carolina. "Labor is tight all over, and companies are looking for people with skills."

Regional economic development officials say when companies come calling, they are able to provide enough skilled workers to satisfy the need. "We have plenty of workers in the northeast," says Vann Rogerson, marketing director for the Northeast Partnership, which is comprised of 16 counties in the Northeast corner of the state—some of them among the state's poorest. "Nucor had 5,400 applications for 350 jobs [Hertford County]. Fineline Boats had 800 applications for 85 jobs [Northampton County]. AAA's call center in

Halifax County had three times the applicants needed for jobs. And we've had success with all kinds of other job skills including workers for a software company in Edenton, and workers for a display company and an equestrian supply company in Washington. In all these cases, we have held successful job fairs for our company clients, and all have been satisfied with the worker pool that the [Eastern] region has provided."

And employment statistics don't necessarily provide a complete picture. "In some cases, the numbers may not look very strong, but you will find areas of strength and competitive advantages [in Eastern North Carolina]," says Jonathan Morgan of Regional Technology Strategies, a nonprofit in

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***"The litmus test that both the biblical and republican traditions give us for assaying the health of a society is how it deals with the problem of wealth and poverty."***

—ROBERT BELLAH ET AL.

*HABITS OF THE HEART*

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Carrboro, N.C., that assists governments, foundations, and other organizations in creating, implementing, and evaluating innovative regional economic development strategies, paying special attention to historically disadvantaged regions and populations. “There is a certain history or tradition of arts and crafts in the region that you don’t hear a lot about,” says Morgan. “This underground economy of sorts is part of the fabric of the region and definitely has positive social and economic implications.”

But despite some positive aspects to a relatively high unemployment rate in recruiting new industry and the fact that employment statistics do not cover every economic activity, high unemployment numbers cannot be viewed as an economic strength. After all, the statistics indicate real people who do not have jobs and thus may have trouble paying their bills and securing the necessities of life for themselves and their families. Indeed, the Center’s look at average unemployment rates from

1990–2000 indicates chronically high unemployment rates relative to the rest of the state and a long-standing need for enhanced job opportunities. Thus, the higher unemployment rates must be viewed as a challenge facing the East—one that suggests the need for even greater efforts to promote economic development and growth.

### **Income** *Per Capita Income*

Income is an important indicator of economic welfare. However, per capita income can be biased by the presence of a small number of high-income individuals,<sup>8</sup> especially as per capita income assesses income by place of residence (includes all people living in an area) rather than by place of work. For example, a county may have a low per capita income but a higher wage rate if it is a regional employment center attracting workers living in another county. In any case, the per capita income measure represents the amount of

economic resources available for individuals and families actually making their homes in the county.

North Carolina's per capita income increased by 60 percent between 1989 and 1999 compared to a 56 percent increase for the southeast United States and 54 percent for the nation as a whole (dollars not adjusted for inflation). The average per capita income increase in Eastern North Carolina counties was 52 percent (See Table 3).<sup>9</sup> Northampton County experienced the highest increase in the East at 71 percent, while Greene County had the smallest increase at 24 percent. Although the per capita incomes of the counties in Eastern North Carolina increased, the average increase (52 percent) was still somewhat lower than the statewide increase (60 percent). The average increase in the eastern counties was similar to that in the Piedmont counties (55 percent) but more than 10 percent less than the mountain counties (64 percent). In the final analysis, Eastern North Carolina had the lowest per capita income of the state's three regions in 1989 at \$13,505. The East was still the poorest region of the state from a per capita income standpoint 10 years later in 1999, when per capita income reached \$20,536. Indeed, per capita income was 22 percent higher in the Piedmont (\$25,088) and 9 percent higher in the mountain region of the state (\$22,409).

### **Average Annual Wage**

As noted above in the discussion on per capita income, wage indicators can skew the appearance of how much workers are earning in a community

as wage measures estimate income by place of work rather than place of residence. However, unlike per capita income, which measures all sources of income, the wage statistic shows a more realistic view of income earned as a result of employment. With this in mind, the wage indicator reveals more about the quality of jobs (i.e., high-skilled, high-paying) available in a county or region but not necessarily the quality of jobs of the people who actually live in that region.

North Carolina's average annual wage<sup>10</sup> in 2000 was \$31,072 while the average wage in Eastern North Carolina counties was \$23,796, only 77 percent of the statewide average.<sup>11</sup> Average annual wages in the region ranged from a low of \$19,648 in Hyde County to a high of \$28,549 in New Hanover County—still well below the state average. Thus, wage statistics support the reputation of the East as a place of relatively low wages.

### **Poverty**

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by size and composition to determine who is poor. If a family's total income is less than that family's threshold, then that family, and every individual in it, is considered poor. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index. By measuring the number and proportion of people with inadequate family incomes to supply food and other necessary goods and services, poverty<sup>12</sup> is a key indicator of difficult living conditions.

Unfortunately, the percentage of the population below the poverty threshold<sup>13</sup> in each county is only available as part of the decennial census and North Carolina's economy has changed considerably since 1990. However, in recent years, the U.S. Census Bureau has calculated small area poverty estimates through the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program with support from a consortium of federal agencies to provide more current estimates.<sup>14</sup> Using these figures, the estimated percentage of people in poverty in N.C. in 1997 is 12.6 percent (13.3 percent in the U.S.) compared to the Eastern North Carolina county average of 17.6 percent in poverty (see Table 4, pp. 26–27).<sup>15</sup>

Tyrrell County has the highest poverty rate in the region and state at 25.7 percent while Dare County has the lowest at 8.1 percent. The average poverty rate in western North Carolina is 14.1 percent with the Piedmont having the lowest average at 11.8 percent.

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***"The only thing poverty does is grind down your nerve endings to a point that you can work harder and stoop lower than most people are willing to. It chips away a person's dreams to the point that the hopelessness shows through, and the dreamer accepts that hard work and borrowed houses are all his life will ever be."***

—RICK BRAGG

*ALL OVER BUT THE SHOUTIN'*

**Table 2. N.C. Average Unemployment Rates,  
by County, 2000 and 1990–2000**

	<b>2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>	<b>1990–2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>		<b>2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>	<b>1990–2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>
Alamance	2.8%	3.8%	Davie	4.3%	3.6%
Alexander	2.3%	3.4%	Duplin*	5.0%	6.4%
Alleghany	7.1%	5.2%	Durham	2.3%	2.8%
Anson	6.6%	8.2%	Edgecombe*	7.5%	8.3%
Ashe	6.2%	7.6%	Forsyth	2.7%	3.5%
Avery	3.5%	5.9%	Franklin	2.6%	4.2%
Beaufort*	7.6%	7.3%	Gaston	6.1%	4.9%
Bertie*	9.2%	6.4%	Gates*	3.3%	3.3%
Bladen*	5.8%	7.3%	Graham	8.1%	12.9%
Brunswick*	4.5%	7.4%	Granville	4.1%	4.2%
Buncombe	2.6%	3.5%	Greene*	4.4%	4.4%
Burke	3.2%	4.1%	Guilford	2.9%	3.6%
Cabarrus	2.6%	3.5%	Halifax*	7.5%	8.1%
Caldwell	2.4%	3.8%	Harnett*	3.9%	4.3%
Camden*	2.5%	3.7%	Haywood	4.0%	5.3%
Carteret*	4.4%	5.1%	Henderson	2.1%	3.1%
Caswell	2.6%	3.7%	Hertford*	5.5%	6.4%
Catawba	2.2%	3.9%	Hoke*	8.0%	6.5%
Chatham	1.9%	2.8%	Hyde*	6.6%	8.4%
Cherokee	7.4%	8.1%	Iredell	3.3%	3.6%
Chowan*	4.0%	4.8%	Jackson	3.5%	5.5%
Clay	4.1%	6.0%	Johnston*	2.2%	3.3%
Cleveland	6.0%	5.8%	Jones*	5.3%	5.0%
Columbus*	10.6%	8.0%	Lee	4.1%	4.7%
Craven*	4.2%	5.0%	Lenoir*	5.5%	6.2%
Cumberland*	4.2%	4.9%	Lincoln	4.1%	4.3%
Currituck*	2.5%	3.2%	Macon	3.5%	4.7%
Dare*	5.1%	5.8%	Madison	3.3%	4.4%
Davidson	2.8%	3.7%	Martin*	9.5%	7.6%

**Table 2, continued**

	<b>2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>	<b>1990–2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>		<b>2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>	<b>1990–2000 Average Unemploy- ment Rate</b>
McDowell	4.6%	5.7%	Scotland*	7.4%	8.2%
Mecklenburg	2.5%	3.2%	Stanly	4.2%	5.2%
Mitchell	5.1%	7.3%	Stokes	3.2%	3.1%
Montgomery	4.1%	6.5%	Surry	4.3%	4.5%
Moore	3.9%	4.6%	Swain	12.5%	14.8%
Nash*	5.3%	5.6%	Transylvania	2.6%	3.6%
New Hanover*	3.5%	5.1%	Tyrrell*	9.7%	10.1%
Northampton*	6.5%	7.0%	Union	2.3%	3.2%
Onslow*	3.7%	4.2%	Vance	8.9%	8.2%
Orange	1.3%	1.9%	Wake	1.5%	2.3%
Pamlico*	3.7%	4.7%	Warren	7.7%	8.2%
Pasquotank*	3.8%	4.8%	Washington*	6.2%	7.1%
Pender*	4.8%	6.1%	Watauga	1.5%	2.8%
Perquimans*	3.6%	4.5%	Wayne*	4.0%	5.1%
Person	4.7%	6.2%	Wilkes	3.3%	4.0%
Pitt*	4.7%	4.9%	Wilson*	7.0%	8.7%
Polk	3.3%	2.8%	Yadkin	3.3%	3.5%
Randolph	3.1%	3.2%	Yancey	3.9%	6.6%
Richmond	6.6%	8.4%			
Robeson*	9.0%	8.5%	Eastern**	5.5%	6.1%
Rockingham	5.4%	5.6%	Piedmont	3.8%	4.4%
Rowan	4.8%	3.9%	Western	4.6%	5.1%
Rutherford	7.5%	6.1%	N.C.	3.6%	
Sampson*	4.0%	5.7%	U.S.	4.0%	

\* Denotes Eastern county.

\*\* Regional figures used here are the mean rate for counties within each region and not an estimate of the percentage of persons unemployed for the entire region.

Source: North Carolina Employment Security Commission. Average annual rates for the period 1990–2000 were calculated by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research using Employment Security Commission data.

**Table 3. Per Capita Income by County in N.C., 1989 vs. 1999**

County	1989	1999	% Change	County	1989	1999	% Change
Alamance	\$17,048	\$26,679	56.5%	Davie	\$19,173	\$29,473	53.7%
Alexander	14,780	22,478	52.1%	Duplin*	12,951	19,133	47.7%
Alleghany	12,959	26,021	100.8%	Durham	19,543	29,677	51.9%
Anson	13,183	21,511	63.2%	Edgecombe*	13,196	17,153	30.0%
Ashe	12,698	21,423	68.7%	Forsyth	21,397	32,775	53.2%
Avery	12,872	23,946	86.0%	Franklin	13,066	22,667	73.5%
Beaufort*	13,866	20,859	50.4%	Gaston	15,793	24,449	54.8%
Bertie*	11,770	19,283	63.8%	Gates*	12,684	18,586	46.5%
Bladen*	12,101	19,656	62.4%	Graham	9,675	18,116	87.2%
Brunswick*	13,108	20,178	53.9%	Granville	13,091	22,102	68.8%
Buncombe	16,880	27,393	62.3%	Greene*	14,228	17,698	24.4%
Burke	14,934	22,085	47.9%	Guilford	20,033	31,425	56.9%
Cabarrus	17,302	28,071	62.2%	Halifax*	12,255	19,377	58.1%
Caldwell	14,703	23,497	59.8%	Harnett*	12,121	19,705	62.6%
Camden*	13,830	21,115	52.7%	Haywood	14,616	22,301	52.6%
Carteret*	14,555	24,128	65.8%	Henderson	17,780	27,782	56.3%
Caswell	11,775	18,951	60.9%	Hertford*	11,407	18,161	59.2%
Catawba	18,211	28,253	55.1%	Hoke*	10,350	13,560	31.0%
Chatham	17,917	30,046	67.7%	Hyde*	13,476	17,613	30.7%
Cherokee	11,440	18,384	60.7%	Iredell	16,246	25,233	55.3%
Chowan*	13,702	21,711	58.5%	Jackson	12,905	22,097	71.2%
Clay	12,026	20,252	68.4%	Johnston*	15,372	24,085	56.7%
Cleveland	15,425	21,647	40.3%	Jones*	11,543	18,194	57.6%
Columbus*	12,354	19,815	60.4%	Lee	16,139	25,740	59.5%
Craven*	15,712	24,312	54.7%	Lenoir*	14,442	21,244	47.1%
Cumberland*	14,932	25,285	69.3%	Lincoln	15,591	21,781	39.7%
Currituck*	15,574	23,319	49.7%	McDowell	12,807	20,491	60.0%
Dare*	16,572	24,566	48.2%	Macon	13,854	22,559	62.8%
Davidson	15,875	24,365	53.5%	Madison	11,862	19,582	65.1%

**Table 3, continued**

County	1989	1999	% Change	County	1989	1999	% Change
Martin*	\$12,882	\$18,770	45.7%	Scotland*	\$12,543	\$20,182	60.9%
Mecklenburg	21,604	37,321	72.8%	Stanly	15,099	22,816	51.1%
Mitchell	12,621	20,519	62.6%	Stokes	14,895	21,170	42.1%
Montgomery	12,908	21,440	66.1%	Surry	15,755	23,465	48.9%
Moore	18,894	29,820	57.8%	Swain	10,336	17,104	65.5%
Nash*	16,927	24,088	42.3%	Transylvania	15,576	24,473	57.1%
New Hanover*	16,594	27,731	67.1%	Tyrrell*	11,945	16,581	38.8%
Northampton*	11,445	18,539	70.7%	Union	16,396	23,522	43.5%
Onslow*	13,943	23,157	66.1%	Vance	13,726	20,168	46.9%
Orange	19,734	29,500	49.5%	Wake	21,874	35,759	63.5%
Pamlico*	14,545	21,919	50.7%	Warren	10,651	16,991	59.5%
Pasquotank*	14,164	20,791	46.8%	Washington*	12,979	18,906	45.7%
Pender*	13,398	17,605	31.4%	Watauga	13,155	22,122	68.2%
Perquimans*	11,579	18,938	63.6%	Wayne*	13,043	20,050	53.7%
Person	13,981	21,835	65.2%	Wilkes	14,797	23,455	58.5%
Pitt*	15,385	23,239	51.0%	Wilson*	15,573	24,550	57.6%
Polk	20,275	30,729	51.6%	Yadkin	15,395	22,222	44.3%
Randolph	15,596	23,721	52.1%	Yancey	12,333	19,277	56.3%
Richmond	12,699	20,032	57.7%				
Robeson*	10,939	17,391	59.0%				
Rockingham	14,885	21,616	45.2%	Eastern**	\$13,505	\$20,536	52.1%
Rowan	15,277	22,820	49.4%	Piedmont	\$16,149	\$25,088	55.3%
Rutherford	13,826	20,751	50.1%	Western	\$13,779	\$22,409	63.7%
Sampson*	13,738	19,815	44.2%	N.C.	\$16,539	\$26,417	59.7%

\* Denotes Eastern county.

\*\* Regional per capita income totals here reflect the mean per capita income for counties within a region, while statewide figures reflect the average per capita income for the entire population.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information Systems,  
<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/reis>.

**Table 4. Poverty Rates by County, 1997 Projected Estimates**

<b>County</b>	<b>1997 Estimate of the Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1997 Estimate of the Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>
Alamance	8.8%	Davie	7.8%
Alexander	10.1	Duplin*	18.4
Alleghany	14.2	Durham	12.4
Anson	18.3	Edgecombe*	21.9
Ashe	15.5	Forsyth	10.8
Avery	15.3	Franklin	13.5
Beaufort*	17.4	Gaston	12.0
Bertie*	22.9	Gates*	15.4
Bladen*	18.8	Graham	18.3
Brunswick*	14.0	Granville	12.3
Buncombe	12.3	Greene*	16.1
Burke	11.8	Guilford	11.2
Cabarrus	8.0	Halifax*	23.6
Caldwell	11.2	Harnett*	14.7
Camden*	12.2	Haywood	13.7
Carteret*	11.8	Henderson	11.4
Caswell	14.3	Hertford*	23.1
Catawba	9.3	Hoke*	18.1
Chatham	7.7	Hyde*	24.8
Cherokee	17.0	Iredell	9.2
Chowan*	18.7	Jackson	16.1
Clay	15.2	Johnston*	12.3
Cleveland	13.2	Jones*	18.0
Columbus*	20.5	Lee	12.9
Craven*	13.8	Lenoir*	18.6
Cumberland*	15.5	Lincoln	10.6
Currituck*	10.8	McDowell	11.6
Dare*	8.1	Macon	13.2
Davidson	10.1	Madison	16.7

**Table 4, continued**

<b>County</b>	<b>1997 Estimate of the Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1997 Estimate of the Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>
Martin*	20.1%	Scotland*	18.8%
Mecklenburg	9.7	Stanly	10.8
Mitchell	13.4	Stokes	10.3
Montgomery	16.0	Surry	11.8
Moore	10.9	Swain	20.9
Nash*	13.7	Transylvania	12.4
New Hanover*	13.0	Tyrrell*	25.7
Northampton*	23.1	Union	8.9
Onslow*	14.6	Vance	19.3
Orange	10.5	Wake	7.8
Pamlico*	16.8	Warren	23.4
Pasquotank*	19.0	Washington*	20.5
Pender*	15.0	Watauga	14.5
Perquimans*	19.5	Wayne*	16.6
Person	11.6	Wilkes	13.3
Pitt*	17.7	Wilson*	18.7
Polk	8.7	Yadkin	10.1
Randolph	8.8	Yancey	15.6
Richmond	18.2		
Robeson*	22.8	Eastern**	17.6%
Rockingham	12.1	Piedmont	11.8%
Rowan	11.8	Western	14.1%
Rutherford	13.7	North Carolina	12.6%
Sampson*	17.5	United States	13.3%

\* Denotes Eastern county.

\*\* Regional figures are averages of the poverty rates of counties within the region.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

**Table 5. N.C. Poverty Rates by County, 1980 and 1990**

<b>County</b>	<b>1980 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>1990 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1980 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>1990 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>
Alamance	10.4%	8.9%	Davidson	10.6%	9.8%
Alexander	8.8%	9.8%	Davie	10.9%	8.4%
Alleghany	19.6%	20.1%	Duplin*	23.1%	19.1%
Anson	16.1%	17.7%	Durham	14.0%	11.9%
Ashe	22.8%	18.4%	Edgecombe*	20.2%	20.9%
Avery	18.0%	14.6%	Forsyth	11.6%	10.5%
Beaufort*	21.0%	19.5%	Franklin	20.3%	14.5%
Bertie*	29.4%	25.9%	Gaston	10.5%	10.6%
Bladen*	25.6%	21.9%	Gates*	19.7%	15.7%
Brunswick*	19.8%	15.4%	Graham	19.6%	24.9%
Buncombe	12.9%	11.4%	Granville	17.3%	13.5%
Burke	10.1%	10.1%	Greene*	25.3%	19.1%
Cabarrus	9.3%	8.1%	Guilford	11.1%	10.1%
Caldwell	10.4%	10.8%	Halifax*	29.5%	25.6%
Camden*	16.1%	16.1%	Harnett*	19.3%	17.5%
Carteret*	14.0%	11.6%	Haywood	15.6%	12.7%
Caswell	19.5%	16.2%	Henderson	12.3%	10.5%
Catawba	8.2%	7.1%	Hertford*	24.3%	25.0%
Chatham	9.1%	9.7%	Hoke*	20.9%	21.1%
Cherokee	22.2%	20.4%	Hyde*	28.3%	24.0%
Chowan*	24.0%	17.7%	Iredell	10.1%	9.4%
Clay	22.8%	18.0%	Jackson	19.3%	16.7%
Cleveland	13.2%	11.0%	Johnston*	17.9%	14.3%
Columbus*	26.5%	24.0%	Jones*	21.8%	20.2%
Craven*	18.5%	13.6%	Lee	13.5%	14.7%
Cumberland*	17.2%	14.4%	Lenoir*	19.9%	20.0%
Currituck*	18.3%	10.1%	Lincoln	9.7%	9.6%
Dare*	11.3%	8.3%	McDowell	11.8%	11.4%

**Table 5, continued**

<b>County</b>	<b>1980 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>1990 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1980 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>	<b>1990 Percent of Persons in Poverty</b>
Macon	17.2%	16.5%	Sampson*	21.2%	20.7%
Madison	25.8%	20.4%	Scotland*	17.3%	18.6%
Martin*	24.1%	22.3%	Stanly	10.5%	11.0%
Mecklenburg	10.9%	9.6%	Stokes	12.6%	9.8%
Mitchell	16.8%	16.0%	Surry	13.7%	11.4%
Montgomery	14.2%	14.4%	Swain	25.9%	27.6%
Moore	13.7%	11.1%	Transylvania	12.9%	13.5%
Nash*	19.9%	13.6%	Tyrrell*	25.2%	25.0%
New Hanover*	15.2%	14.0%	Union	10.3%	8.4%
Northampton*	28.1%	23.6%	Vance	21.0%	19.6%
Onslow*	16.9%	12.1%	Wake	10.0%	8.4%
Orange	15.1%	13.9%	Warren	30.5%	28.2%
Pamlico*	20.6%	18.9%	Washington*	21.7%	20.4%
Pasquotank*	17.7%	19.8%	Watauga	22.7%	21.5%
Pender*	21.3%	17.2%	Wayne*	17.9%	15.2%
Perquimans*	24.4%	21.6%	Wilkes	13.8%	13.3%
Person	16.6%	13.0%	Wilson*	20.0%	19.7%
Pitt*	23.5%	22.1%	Yadkin	14.3%	12.0%
Polk	13.7%	9.6%	Yancey	23.4%	18.7%
Randolph	8.9%	8.3%			
Richmond	15.2%	16.8%			
Robeson*	24.9%	24.1%	Eastern**	21.3%	18.8%
Rockingham	12.8%	12.2%	Piedmont	13.2%	11.9%
Rowan	9.7%	9.4%	Western	17.4%	15.9%
Rutherford	13.7%	12.3%	North Carolina	14.8%	12.9%

\* Denotes eastern counties

\*\* Regional figures are averages of the poverty rates of counties within the region.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

—continued from page 21

Higher poverty rates in Eastern North Carolina counties parallel their relatively lower per capita incomes and wages. Indeed, poverty rates exceed 20 percent in 11 of the 41 Eastern counties, and all but five counties exceed the statewide average of 12.6 percent. Thus, Eastern North Carolina is, on the whole, the poorest region in the state.

That Eastern North Carolina should be relatively poor compared to the rest of the state should come as no surprise. The same was true in 1990, when the U.S. census put the average rate for counties within the region at 18.8 percent, and in 1980, when the rate was 21.3 percent (see Table 5, pp. 28–29). Indeed, the East's long-standing reputation for relative poverty is well deserved. Robeson County Commissioner Noah Woods says the impact of persistent poverty runs deep. "We tend to have a higher proportion of money going to social services, especially with job losses and the slower economy, and that hurts money for education and puts a larger burden on the taxpayer," says Woods. "If we could divert that to education, it would really help."

## Education

**M**ore than ever before, securing a job with a livable wage requires that workers, whether urban or rural, be well-educated and well-trained. Workers with no education or training beyond high school are increasingly at risk of spending their working lives working for low wages that may not provide for their individual or family needs and may result in a life of poverty. Furthermore, communities with a less skilled work force stand at a growing disadvantage in generating and retaining the kinds of economic development that can improve the standard of living of their residents.<sup>16</sup> While states and communities tend to invest in highways and infrastructure for economic and quality of life improvements, the ultimate source of economic improvement is the human mind.<sup>17</sup>

## Literacy

Estimating literacy levels has always been difficult. One obvious difficulty is that "test-

ing" the entire population is not feasible. Another is that relying on self-reported information provides questionable data. Furthermore, changes in what constitutes literacy and what kinds of literacy are needed in different contexts also make it difficult to use the information that is available. For example, 100 years ago people were said to be literate if they could sign their names. Today, an increasingly technological society has greater and more rigorous literacy demands. People must be able to read, write, do math, and think critically in the contexts of their work, families, and communities at levels far more advanced than even a generation ago.<sup>18</sup>

In 1993, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), under contract from the U.S. Department of Education, surveyed 26,000 adults across the country to profile the English literacy of adults based on their performance on a wide array of tasks that reflect the types of materials and demands adults encounter in daily life. ETS used the results from the test group to generalize about the English literacy of adults nationally. The study, called the National Adult Literacy Survey, made several important contributions to knowledge of literacy, including the creation of their new, outcomes-based definition of literacy: "Literacy is using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." As a result of the national survey, the North Carolina Literacy Resource Center has been able to estimate literacy levels in North Carolina. Level 1 is comprised of adults having serious difficulties with literacy and needing significant literacy instruction; level 2 is made up of adults who may perform well in everyday literacy tasks but could still benefit from literacy instruction; and levels 3–5 describe adults with sufficient literacy to function in society. The latest estimates show that Eastern North Carolina has the greatest problem with

illiteracy of any region of the state (see Table 6, pp. 34–35). More than a fourth of Eastern North Carolina residents (29 percent) function at level 1, a percentage quite a bit higher than the Piedmont (22 percent) and the mountain region (19 percent). Statewide, 22 percent of adults in North Carolina have serious literacy difficulty

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***"In every child who is born, under  
no matter what circumstances,  
and of no matter what parents,  
the potentiality of the human race  
is born again. . . ."***

—JAMES AGEE AND WALKER EVANS  
***LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN***

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Karen Tam

(level 1). Likewise, the percentage of adults in the eastern counties scoring sufficient literacy levels (levels 3–5) is 10 percent less than the statewide average and 8 percent less than the other regions in the state.

Of course, there are regional bright spots. Dare County in the coastal northeast, for example, has among the best literacy rates in the state. Carteret County, another coastal county, also has relatively strong literacy rates. However, these are high-growth counties with well-educated newcomers arriving daily, and they are exceptions to the general rule. Why is the literacy problem more pronounced in Eastern North Carolina? Experts suggest the potent combination of poverty and isolation. “There are some pockets in Eastern North Carolina where the rural and isolated quality of life contribute to literacy problems,” says Mary Dunn Siedow, director of the North Carolina Literacy Resource Center. All of North Carolina’s 58 community colleges have basic skills programs to provide educational opportunities for adults 16 years or older who are out of

school and to address the needs of adults who do not have a high school diploma or who lack sufficient mastery of basic education skills. But some colleges have broad service areas supporting several counties. For example, the smallest community college in the East, College of the Albemarle, serves a huge geographic area consisting of seven counties surrounding a huge body of water called the Albemarle Sound. Because of such a wide service area, transportation to literacy programs can be an obstacle. “Services are spotty in some areas,” says Siedow. “Getting out near the people is the tough part.”

Statewide, North Carolina’s literacy levels are similar to the nation as a whole. But the fact that literacy levels aren’t necessarily improving raises concern. “The old explanation that lots of people are older and therefore less educated than today’s youth doesn’t fit anymore,” says Siedow. “We’ve been talking about this for 40 years, so I say to myself, ‘What’s going on here?’ Somehow, we’re replenishing a portion of the population that can’t read or write.”

**"We've been talking about this  
[literacy] for 40 years, so I say to  
myself, 'What's going on here?'  
Somehow, we're replenishing a  
portion of the population  
that can't read or write."**

—MARY DUNN SIEDOW

LITERACY EXPERT

### ***High School Dropouts***

The state's 117 local school systems play a crucial role in educating and training tomorrow's workforce.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind, the number of high school dropouts also influences the educational background and employability of a population. In today's fast-paced technology-based job market, many companies and organizations require employees to have at least a high school diploma, if not a college degree. With literacy levels lower in the Eastern counties than the state as a whole, the region also lags when it comes to high school dropout rates (see Table 7, pp. 36–37). The 1999–2000 statewide dropout rate was 6.43. The school systems in the eastern counties had the highest average dropout rate at 6.85, with the Piedmont counties average also being higher than the state rate at 6.55 while mountain counties had the lowest average and lower than the state at 6.04.<sup>20</sup> Among the eastern counties, Tyrrell County had the lowest dropout rate at 1.64 percent, while Washington County had a dropout rate of 3.86 percent. At the other extreme, Hyde County had the highest dropout rate in the East and statewide at 12.42 percent.

### ***High School and College Graduates***

In 1990, almost 78 percent of Americans over the age of 25 were high school graduates. Unfortunately, North Carolina trailed the nation with only 70 percent of Tar Heels over the age of 25 being high school graduates. The 41 counties in Eastern North Carolina were even farther behind at 64 percent, a little lower than the Piedmont (66 percent) but higher than the western counties (62 percent) (See Table 8).<sup>21</sup> While more than two-thirds of North Carolina's residents over the age of 25 had graduated from high school, fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) were college graduates. Only 11 per-

cent of the residents in Eastern North Carolina were college graduates, which is lower than both the Piedmont and mountain regions at 14 and 13 percent, respectively. North Carolina's college graduation rate wasn't as far behind the national rate of 21 percent. These data are based on the 1990 census. The U.S. Bureau of the Census does not release county-level data for the 2000 census until the spring of 2002.

### ***Work Force Preparedness***

A July 2000 investment opportunity report about Eastern N.C. in *Site Selection* magazine noted the state's reputation as an "outstanding place to do business." The report—sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Commerce—asserted that one of the reasons for North Carolina's success is that the state has one of the country's "most highly regarded industry training programs through its Community College system." The report also maintained that the state "has the Southeast's largest manufacturing labor force and one of the country's friendliest labor climates" and "has some of the nation's top institutions of higher learning."<sup>22</sup>

"We are well blessed with community colleges in Eastern North Carolina," says Wayne Daves of the Workforce Development Commission. "We have a comprehensive array of workforce development programs [at the community colleges]." Of the 58 community colleges in N.C., 27 are located in Eastern North Carolina. Table 9 lists the community colleges located in these counties and the counties in the region they serve.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the 27 community colleges located Down East, five of the 16 universities that comprise the University of North Carolina system are located in Eastern North Carolina counties. These universities include East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

To compete for high-quality, high-paying jobs, Eastern North Carolina's citizens must have the education and training needed to succeed. However, the quality of the work force is perhaps the most complex, long-term economic development challenge. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess statistically a region's work force preparedness beyond examining such statistics as high school and college graduation rates, high school dropout rates, and basic literacy skills of a population. Eastern North Carolina has a substantially greater problem

with illiteracy than the rest of the state, and its percentage of high school and college graduates over age 25 is lower than that of the Piedmont and mountain regions. However, the East's high school dropout rate is only slightly higher than that of the Piedmont, suggesting that the region's education deficit may ultimately right itself.

And, like the rest of the state, the East has a full range of programs in place to improve the quality of its work force. Still, many local officials readily admit there is more work to be done. "Most of the school systems [in Eastern North Carolina] are putting in more technology, and when all of that is meshed together the work force is going to be extremely great," says Robeson County Commissioner Noah Woods, who is also a retired school administrator.

The programs available to students in public schools and community colleges lend some insight as to how North Carolina addresses work force development issues. For example, the state's Tech Prep program offers high school students a seamless educational program that begins in the 9th grade and continues through high school into the community college and ends with a student obtaining a two-year associate degree, two-year certificate, or completion of a two-year registered apprenticeship. The program aims to prepare students to enter the high-wage, highly technical, and rapidly changing career fields available in the present and future workplace. In addition to programs such as Tech Prep, in September 1999 the N.C. Board of Community Colleges and the N.C. State Board of Education approved a statewide articulation agreement that allows high school students to obtain credit for introductory community college courses that they've essentially completed at the high school level. "Kids coming out of high school these days have had computers since kindergarten," says Stephen Athans, former Associate Director of the Tech Prep Program and currently Director of Resource Development, Proprietary School Licensing, and SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) Criteria for the Community College System. "They can make those computers walk and talk." The statewide articulation agreement frees students to graduate sooner or take advanced courses better preparing them for the workplace.

Another recent shift implemented by the Community College System, moving to a semester rather than quarterly schedule, has also opened more doors for educational advancement. The move essentially makes it easier for community college students to transfer to one of the state's 16

universities. In addition, since 70 percent of the state's public high schools operate on a block schedule, which is more compatible with the community college's schedule, high school students can take concurrent classes at the community colleges. This option is especially beneficial to some of the smaller and less wealthy school systems in Eastern North Carolina. In a similar way, the community college system's new Huskins Program enables community college instructors to visit high schools to teach a college level course or for a school system to transport a high school class to a local community college to complete a college course.

The community colleges also offer customized training for new and expanding industry, a program that paid off when Regulator Marine, a boatbuilder in the Chowan County town of Edenton, opted to double its work force in 1999. "Because there simply aren't people with boatbuilding skills walking the streets of Edenton, we had to come up with some way of selecting and training unskilled people," says Joan Maxwell, the company's vice president. "So our community college—College of the Albemarle—helped us take people with virtually no skills and, in six months time, give them a trade."<sup>24</sup>

Athans says Eastern North Carolina is making positive efforts in work force development. However, the lack of big industry in the area does pose some disadvantages compared to the urban areas of the state. "Bigger schools have been at it a little longer and have big companies that are really working hard," says Athans. "Like in Duplin County, hog farmers just aren't out there [working with community college programs]," Athans adds.

—continues on page 40

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***"If you have never been hungry,  
you can never know the either/or  
agony created by a single sorghum  
biscuit—either your brother gets it  
or you do. And if you do eat it,  
you know in your bones you have  
stolen the food straight from his  
mouth, there being so little for  
either of you."***

—CHARLES JOHNSON  
MIDDLE PASSAGE

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**Table 6. 1998 Estimates of Levels of Adult Literacy in N.C.,  
by County**

County	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 3-5	County	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 3-5
Alamance	20%	31%	49%	Duplin*	32%	36%	32%
Alexander	16	37	47	Durham	24	23	53
Alleghany	21	40	39	Edgecombe*	35	37	28
Anson	33	36	31	Forsyth	21	26	53
Ashe	21	38	41	Franklin	28	36	36
Avery	18	34	48	Gaston	20	34	46
Beaufort*	27	34	39	Gates*	35	35	30
Bertie*	42	39	19	Graham	21	40	39
Bladen*	33	37	30	Granville	31	35	34
Brunswick*	24	31	45	Greene*	33	36	31
Buncombe	18	27	55	Guilford	21	25	54
Burke	19	34	47	Halifax*	38	38	24
Cabarrus	18	32	50	Harnett*	25	34	41
Caldwell	18	37	45	Haywood	18	32	50
Camden* **				Henderson	18	27	55
Carteret*	18	28	54	Hertford*	38	36	26
Caswell	33	38	29	Hoke*	34	38	28
Catawba	16	30	54	Hyde* **			
Chatham	22	29	49	Iredell	19	31	50
Cherokee	21	36	43	Jackson	15	30	55
Chowan*	31	34	35	Johnston*	23	33	44
Clay	22	34	44	Jones*	32	Not Available	
Cleveland	22	34	44	Lee	24	29	47
Columbus*	31	36	33	Lenoir*	30	35	35
Craven*	23	29	48	Lincoln	17	35	48
Cumberland*	24	28	48	McDowell	19	35	46
Currituck*	19	36	45	Macon	20	32	48
Dare*	12	26	62	Madison	19	37	44
Davidson	17	34	49	Martin*	34	37	29
Davie	18	32	50	Mecklenburg	20	22	58

**Table 6, continued**

County	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 3-5	County	Level 1	Level 2	Levels 3-5
Mitchell	21%	39%	40%	Stanly	20%	34%	46%
Montgomery	27	39	34	Stokes	17	37	46
Moore	22	27	51	Surry	19	36	45
Nash*	26	33	41	Swain	23	36	41
New Hanover*	20	25	55	Transylvania	19	30	51
Northampton*	42	39	19	Tyrrell* **			
Onslow*	18	31	51	Union	17	32	51
Orange	15	18	67	Vance	33	37	30
Pamlico*	28	31	41	Wake	17	19	64
Pasquotank*	29	33	38	Warren	41	40	19
Pender*	28	33	39	Washington*	33	37	30
Perquimans*	30	35	35	Watauga	12	27	61
Person	25	34	41	Wayne*	26	32	42
Pitt*	23	29	48	Wilkes	20	38	42
Polk	21	31	48	Wilson*	30	33	37
Randolph	15	37	48	Yadkin	19	34	47
Richmond	28	36	36	Yancey	21	35	44
Robeson*	27	36	37				
Rockingham	24	36	40				
Rowan	21	32	47	Eastern	29	34	38
Rutherford	21	35	44	Piedmont	22	32	46
Sampson*	29	35	36	Mountain	19	34	46
Scotland*	30	35	35	North Carolina	22	30	48

\* Denotes Eastern county.

\*\* Counties marked with two asterisks (\*\*) have populations too small to calculate reliable estimates.

Source: Mary Dunn Siedow, Ed.D., "Literacy in North Carolina, 1998 Edition," North Carolina Literacy Resource Center, Raleigh, N.C. found at [www.nclrc.state.nc.us/home/reports/litnc98.htm](http://www.nclrc.state.nc.us/home/reports/litnc98.htm). Level 1 represents the lowest level of literacy, Level 2 the next lowest, and Levels 3-5 the highest. See page 30 for a more detailed explanation of these levels.

**Table 7. Dropout Rates in Grades 9–12, 1999–2000,  
for All 117 School Districts in N.C.**

<b>School System</b>	<b>1999–2000 Grades 9–12 Dropout Rate</b>	<b>School System</b>	<b>1999–2000 Grades 9–12 Dropout Rate</b>
Alamance-Burlington	7.31%	Currituck*	8.73%
Alexander	6.77	Dare*	5.91
Alleghany	6.29	Davidson	5.53
Anson	9.09	Lexington City	7.17
Ashe	7.91	Thomasville City	5.99
Avery	7.65	Davie	5.66
Beaufort*	6.95	Duplin*	5.32
Bertie*	6.00	Durham	6.08
Bladen*	4.64	Edgecombe*	8.55
Brunswick*	8.49	Forsyth	6.42
Buncombe	7.21	Franklin	8.85
Asheville City	5.60	Gaston	7.53
Burke	7.28	Gates*	7.53
Cabarrus	5.48	Graham	5.93
Kannapolis City	6.20	Granville	8.15
Caldwell	6.43	Greene*	7.28
Camden*	8.99	Guilford	5.97
Carteret*	6.31	Halifax*	7.27
Caswell	7.48	Roanoke Rapids City*	5.29
Catawba	6.03	Weldon City*	4.87
Hickory City	10.50	Harnett*	7.83
Newton-Conover	2.85	Haywood	6.23
Chatham	7.92	Henderson	5.74
Cherokee	5.49	Hertford*	8.03
Chowan/Edenton*	5.34	Hoke*	9.53
Clay	7.86	Hyde*	12.42
Cleveland	5.48	Iredell-Statesville	6.91
Kings Mountain	7.81	Mooreville City	4.86
Shelby City	6.20	Jackson	5.83
Columbus*	7.53	Johnston*	6.36
Whiteville City*	6.13	Jones*	5.65
Craven*	6.62	Lee	5.71
Cumberland*	5.05	Lenoir*	7.61

**Table 7, continued**

<b>School System</b>	<b>1999-2000 Grades 9-12 Dropout Rate</b>	<b>School System</b>	<b>1999-2000 Grades 9-12 Dropout Rate</b>
Lincoln	7.61%	Rutherford	9.23%
McDowell	7.24	Sampson*	3.82
Macon	6.97	Clinton City*	7.19
Madison	5.11	Scotland*	7.93
Martin*	7.27	Stanly	4.92
Mecklenburg	6.82	Stokes	6.54
Mitchell	3.44	Surry	6.83
Montgomery	8.14	Elkin City	1.99
Moore	5.15	Mount Airy City	2.60
Nash-Rocky Mount*	7.74	Swain	6.11
New Hanover*	5.83	Transylvania	6.38
Northampton*	7.43	Tyrrell*	1.64
Onslow*	6.65	Union	5.41
Orange	4.73	Vance	8.79
Chapel Hill-Carrboro	1.15	Wake	4.14
Pamlico*	5.02	Warren	10.96
Pasquotank*	6.86	Washington*	3.86
Pender*	7.62	Watauga	6.01
Perquimans*	8.62	Wayne*	4.89
Person	6.30	Wilkes	6.71
Pitt*	7.83	Wilson*	7.89
Polk	3.00	Yadkin	5.39
Randolph	8.12	Yancey	5.95
Asheboro City	7.60		
Richmond	6.71	Eastern	6.85%
Robeson*	10.18	Piedmont	6.55%
Rockingham	5.53	Western	6.04%
Rowan-Salisbury	6.61	North Carolina**	6.43%

\* Denotes Eastern school system. City school systems are included beneath the county in which they are located.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Note: Beginning with the 1998-99 dropout reporting, students who withdrew from school to pursue community college GED or adult high school diploma programs were counted as dropouts.

**Table 8. Percentage of Persons Over Age 25 Who Are  
High School and College Graduates in N.C., 1990**

<b>County</b>	<b>Percent High School Graduates</b>	<b>Percent College Graduates</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Percent High School Graduates</b>	<b>Percent College Graduates</b>
Alamance	67.9%	14.6%	Davidson	64.2%	10.0%
Alexander	59.0%	7.9%	Davie	69.6%	14.7%
Alleghany	52.6%	9.0%	Duplin*	56.4%	6.6%
Anson	60.8%	7.3%	Durham	78.9%	33.4%
Ashe	55.6%	8.1%	Edgecombe*	58.5%	8.1%
Avery	62.2%	12.4%	Forsyth	77.6%	24.1%
Beaufort*	65.9%	10.8%	Franklin	62.4%	9.2%
Bertie*	54.9%	8.0%	Gaston	60.9%	10.8%
Bladen*	56.4%	7.7%	Gates*	60.9%	7.4%
Brunswick*	69.2%	10.7%	Graham	56.9%	10.0%
Buncombe	74.5%	19.1%	Granville	62.0%	9.6%
Burke	60.1%	10.6%	Greene*	59.2%	8.9%
Cabarrus	67.4%	12.3%	Guilford	76.1%	24.8%
Caldwell	56.8%	8.9%	Halifax*	53.9%	8.6%
Camden*	66.2%	10.1%	Harnett*	64.0%	9.5%
Carteret*	75.5%	16.2%	Haywood	68.0%	12.8%
Caswell	55.0%	6.6%	Henderson	76.2%	19.5%
Catawba	66.7%	14.2%	Hertford*	58.1%	10.7%
Chatham	70.0%	19.5%	Hoke*	55.7%	8.4%
Cherokee	59.9%	8.0%	Hyde*	60.0%	7.7%
Chowan*	63.3%	12.2%	Iredell	66.5%	11.8%
Clay	62.9%	12.6%	Jackson	68.7%	19.7%
Cleveland	63.5%	11.1%	Johnston*	64.6%	11.1%
Columbus*	59.4%	9.1%	Jones*	62.4%	8.1%
Craven*	75.9%	15.1%	Lee	72.4%	14.3%
Cumberland*	80.3%	16.6%	Lenoir*	62.9%	11.5%
Currituck*	67.7%	8.2%	Lincoln	62.0%	10.5%
Dare*	81.0%	21.4%	McDowell	58.5%	8.1%

**Table 8, continued**

<b>County</b>	<b>Percent High School Graduates</b>	<b>Percent College Graduates</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Percent High School Graduates</b>	<b>Percent College Graduates</b>
Macon	66.7%	13.2%	Sampson*	61.3%	8.1%
Madison	56.4%	11.3%	Scotland*	60.7%	13.6%
Martin*	58.3%	9.5%	Stanly	62.1%	9.4%
Mecklenburg	81.6%	28.3%	Stokes	62.8%	7.3%
Mitchell	55.3%	9.2%	Surry	57.3%	9.4%
Montgomery	55.3%	7.8%	Swain	59.0%	9.9%
Moore	74.3%	19.9%	Transylvania	72.1%	17.9%
Nash*	65.1%	13.7%	Tyrrell*	58.0%	7.6%
New Hanover*	78.1%	21.2%	Union	69.0%	13.2%
Northampton*	52.8%	8.8%	Vance	57.1%	9.5%
Onslow*	83.0%	13.4%	Wake	85.4%	35.3%
Orange	83.6%	46.1%	Warren	53.7%	7.1%
Pamlico*	65.9%	11.6%	Washington*	60.6%	8.7%
Pasquotank*	67.4%	14.4%	Watauga	72.0%	27.4%
Pender*	64.6%	11.6%	Wayne*	71.2%	12.7%
Perquimans*	61.2%	8.8%	Wilkes	54.1%	8.8%
Person	63.2%	7.6%	Wilson*	62.2%	14.4%
Pitt*	71.0%	21.9%	Yadkin	58.9%	7.1%
Polk	69.6%	20.1%	Yancey	60.7%	10.0%
Randolph	62.0%	9.1%			
Richmond	60.4%	7.9%	Eastern	64.2%	11.3%
Robeson*	57.0%	11.0%	Piedmont	66.2%	14.4%
Rockingham	59.2%	8.8%	Western	62.3%	12.7%
Rowan	66.0%	11.7%	N.C.	70.0%	17.4%
Rutherford	59.4%	9.8%	U.S.	77.6%	21.3%

\* Denotes Eastern county.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

Note: Only done for counties at the decennial census. County-level results are typically released two to three years after the completion of the census.

**Table 9. Community Colleges (CC) in Eastern North Carolina**

<b>Community College</b>	<b>Eastern North Carolina County Served</b>	<b>Community College</b>	<b>Eastern North Carolina County Served</b>
1. Beaufort CC	Beaufort Hyde Tyrrell Washington	13. James Sprunt CC	Duplin
2. Bladen CC	Bladen	14. Johnston CC	Johnston
3. Brunswick CC	Brunswick	15. Lenoir CC	Greene Lenoir Jones
4. Cape Fear CC	New Hanover Pender	16. Martin CC	Bertie Martin
5. Carteret CC	Carteret	17. Nash CC	Nash
6. Central Carolina CC	Harnett	18. Pamlico CC	Pamlico
7. Coastal Carolina	Onslow	19. Pitt CC	Pitt
8. College of the Albemarle	Camden Chowan Currituck Dare Gates Pasquotank Perquimans	20. Richmond CC	Scotland
9. Craven CC	Craven	21. Robeson CC	Robeson
10. Edgecombe CC	Edgecombe	22. Roanoke-Chowan CC	Hertford
11. Fayetteville Tech	Cumberland	23. Sampson CC	Sampson
12. Halifax CC	Halifax Northampton	24. Sandhills CC	Hoke
		25. Southeastern CC	Columbus
		26. Wayne CC	Wayne
		27. Wilson Tech	Wilson

*Source:* North Carolina Community College System, Raleigh, N.C.


—continued from page 33

## **Conclusion**

**P**erhaps Eastern North Carolina won't host another event that will measure up to Orville Wright's revolutionary first flight. The region still offers the same spirit of hospitality, resilience, and hard work as those who welcomed and assisted the Wright brothers nearly a century ago. And, the broader regional numbers hide some strong economic success stories, such as that of New Hanover County, where unemployment is relatively low and

both population growth and per capita income exceed the state average. The State Port at Wilmington provides an economic engine for the county, as does the movie industry, a well-developed manufacturing base, and beaches that are popular with tourists and retirees. Indeed, New Hanover is one of eight coastal counties with ocean-front real estate, most of them marked by strong population growth and development. Counties along the eastern region's coastal rivers and sounds also have natural resources that provide for future growth. In addition, counties like Craven and

neighboring Pitt—home of East Carolina University, and military-dependent counties such as Cumberland, Onslow, and Wayne provide hubs of economic activity.

However, set against these assets are some stark numbers. As a region, Eastern North Carolina is last in per capita income, lowest in wages paid, highest in poverty, and highest in unemployment. And some may argue it remains first in flight since the few North Carolina counties still losing population are located in the East. In addition, the East faces a bit of an education deficit compared to the rest of the state, with fewer high school and college graduates and a greater problem with illiteracy. The challenges of finding high-quality jobs for the region's residents, of increasing incomes and reducing poverty, and of continuing to prepare a young work force and re-train an older one are not easy to meet. But Eastern North Carolina must meet these challenges if the region is to ascend on a flight of its own. 

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the First Flight Centennial Commission, a part of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, N.C. on the Internet at [www.firstflightnc.com/first.cfm](http://www.firstflightnc.com/first.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> "North Carolina Rural Prosperity Task Force Report," North Carolina Rural Prosperity Task Force, Raleigh, N.C., February 21, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research previously took a detailed look at U.S. Census Bureau data to paint a statistical portrait of the state's population in Ken Otterbourg and Mike McLaughlin, "North Carolina's Demographic Destiny: The Policy Implications of the 1990 Census," *North Carolina Insight*, Volume 14, No. 4, August 1993, pp. 2-49.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Data from the N.C. Office of State Budget, Planning, and Management on the Internet at [www.demog.state.nc.us/ctyncest.html](http://www.demog.state.nc.us/ctyncest.html).

<sup>5</sup> Employment Security Commission of N.C. on the Internet [www.esc.state.nc.us/econ\\_data/publications.asp](http://www.esc.state.nc.us/econ_data/publications.asp).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Regional Economic Information Systems, Washington, D.C., <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/reis>.

<sup>7</sup> North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, "Choices for a New Century." December 1999, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Per capita personal income of a county is defined as the income received by, or on behalf of all residents. It includes income from all sources: labor income, proprietor's income, government transfer payments (those due to poverty and those which are age-related such as Social Security), and dividends, interest, and rent.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System, Washington, D.C. On the Internet at <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/reis>

<sup>10</sup> North Carolina's average annual wage is the total county average annual wage for all reporting units. Wages and salaries include all reported income, including gross wages and salaries, bonuses, tips and other gratuities. Wages and salaries do not include employer contributions to old age, survivors' and disability insurance (OASDI), health insurance, unemployment insur-

ance, workers' compensation, and private pension and welfare funds. Employment Security Commission of North Carolina on the Internet at [jobs.esc.state.nc.us/lmi/ew/EW2000A/ctyindx.htm](http://jobs.esc.state.nc.us/lmi/ew/EW2000A/ctyindx.htm).

<sup>11</sup> N.C. Employment Security Commission, Labor Market Information Division on the Internet at [jobs.esc.state.nc.us/lmi/ew/EW2000A/ctyindx.htm](http://jobs.esc.state.nc.us/lmi/ew/EW2000A/ctyindx.htm)

<sup>12</sup> The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps). Poverty is not defined for people in military barracks, institutional group quarters, or for unrelated individuals under age 15 (such as foster children).

<sup>13</sup> In 1997, the poverty threshold ranged from \$8,183 for an individual to \$32,566 for nine persons or more. On the Internet at [www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh97.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh97.html).

<sup>14</sup> Estimates of income and poverty derived from models that employ the administrative record data currently at hand are much less precise than those derived directly from the "long form" which was sent to approximately one-sixth of the nation's households as part of the 1990 Census. Thus, for most counties, the model-based estimates for 1993 and 1995 are less statistically precise than the census estimates were for 1989. In gauging the margin of error by the average relative width of the 90-percent confidence interval, the width of the 90-percent confidence interval is expressed as a fraction of the estimate. The margins of error associated with the decennial census estimates are strongly related to the population size of the county, while that relationship is much less strong for the model-based estimates. Thus, the model estimates have a smaller margin of error for small counties than the census, while the opposite is true for large counties.

<sup>15</sup> 1997 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., June 2001.

<sup>16</sup> "North Carolina Rural Prosperity Task Force Report," North Carolina Rural Prosperity Task Force, Raleigh, N.C., February 21, 2000, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Moore, "Why Capital Matters," paper published in "Unleashing America's Potential: A Report of the National Commission on Economic Growth and Tax Reform," The National Commission on Economic Growth and Tax Reform, Washington, D.C., January 1996, on the Internet at [zeus.townhall.com/taxcom/moore1.html](http://zeus.townhall.com/taxcom/moore1.html).

<sup>18</sup> Mary Dunn Siedow, "Literacy in North Carolina, 1998 Edition," North Carolina Literacy Resource Center, Raleigh, N.C., on the Internet at [www.nclrc.state.nc.us/home/reports/litnc98.htm](http://www.nclrc.state.nc.us/home/reports/litnc98.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas D. Rowley and David Freshwater. "Are Workers in the Rural South Ready for the Future?" *Rural Development Perspectives*, The Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., October 1999, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> "North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile: 2001," North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, NC, pp. 35-37.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., 1990

<sup>22</sup> Tim Venable, "Eastern North Carolina: Open for Business," Site Selection Investment Opportunity Report, *Site Selection Magazine*, Conway Data, Inc. Atlanta, Georgia, July 2000 on the Internet at [www.siteselection.com/features/2000/july/eastnc/](http://www.siteselection.com/features/2000/july/eastnc/). "Friendly labor climate refers to the state's low unionization rate and the fact that North Carolina is a right-to-work state."

<sup>23</sup> North Carolina Community College System Map on the Internet at [www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/colleges\\_map.htm](http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/colleges_map.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Bivins, "Everybody's Talking—North Carolina's Northeast garners lots of media attention for attracting new industries and hordes of tourists," *North Carolina*, N.C. Citizens for Business and Industry, Raleigh, N.C., April 2001, pp. 33-34.