

Lower Savannah CLNA Executive Summary 2026

Introduction:

The Lower Savannah Workforce Development Region encompasses six counties including Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, and Orangeburg. The region provides Career and Technical Education opportunities through six school districts and three technical colleges (Aiken Technical College, Denmark Technical College, and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College), which work collaboratively with area business and industry partners, workforce agencies, and community organizations to provide high-quality education and work-based learning opportunities.

Executive Summary Questions:

1. What are your region's key successes and strengths?

The region benefits from strong alignment between CTE programs and the needs of high-demand industries, supported by robust partnerships among school districts, technical colleges, employers, and workforce development organizations. These collaborative relationships have fostered effective career pathway development that begins with career exploration in the middle grades and extends through secondary education, postsecondary training, and ultimately employment. Strong and expanding dual enrollment opportunities provide students with streamlined pathways into high-wage, high-demand careers while strengthening connections between secondary and postsecondary institutions. The region's schools and colleges are also committed to providing robust student support services that promote access and equity for all students through career-pathway assessments, tutoring, coaching, academic advising, and other targeted interventions that support student success. This holistic approach to student completion and credential attainment is further enhanced by a broad array of industry-recognized certifications offered by the technical colleges, ensuring that students graduate with the knowledge, skills, and credentials necessary to meet workforce demands and achieve long-term career success.

These strengths position the Lower Savannah region to continue supplying skilled workers to key industries while supporting student success across the educational pipeline.

2. What are the primary opportunities for improvement?

The region must capitalize on strong partnerships to strengthen education pathways into workforce pipelines that meet the needs of local employers. Key areas for improvement include addressing persistent workforce shortages in manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and transportation. One way to meet this opportunity is to improve marketing and information sharing to increase awareness for students and parents regarding high-need, high-skill, high-wage careers. There is a clear disconnect between career opportunities with lucrative pay and student/parent perceptions. In a recent survey of parents in the region, only 1.74% of 344 parents selected

manufacturing as their top field of choice for their children. Further, only 1.31% of 1396 surveyed students selected it as their top career pathway of interest.

Perhaps the region's greatest opportunity lies in planning for future expansion. Recent announcements of industry economic commitments have been made in five of the region's six counties including 7,400 new jobs in Aiken County (Rolls Royce, Kimberly Clark, META Data Center, and SRNS); 150 jobs in Allendale County (Hampton Lumber); 150 jobs in Bamberg County (JGB Brothers, Circular Composite Solutions, and Black Horse Steel Works); 50 jobs in Barnwell County (Barnwell Tissue Solutions); and 1100 jobs in Orangeburg County (Ferrera and MCIS). In order to meet the need and ensure a highly trained and skilled workforce, high schools, career centers, and the technical colleges must expand dual enrollment opportunities, work-based learning experiences, and internships/apprenticeships.

3. What actions are planned to address these opportunities?

The region plans to accelerate growth by increasing career awareness and marketing so that students, families, and jobseekers have a better understanding of the high-demand opportunities available. To strengthen the student pipeline, the region will expand internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning experiences that connect individuals directly with employers. Youth apprenticeship opportunities are of particular interest. Academic support services including inclusive advising and tutoring methods will be enhanced to ensure students are prepared for technical training and high-skill careers. At the same time, high schools, career centers, and technical colleges across all six counties will improve access and targeted support for special populations through investment in simulation technology, updated equipment, and ongoing faculty development. Together, these actions aim to build a more skilled, inclusive, and industry-aligned workforce capable of meeting the region and the state's long-term economic needs.

Partnership activities will also strengthen the region's response. Specific examples include the Southern Carolina Alliance's pilot program with the Department of Employment and Workforce. The program supports Allendale, Bamberg, and Barnwell counties and addresses awareness and helps identify skills to find solutions to challenges in the manufacturing industry faces in their region. The pilot aligns with the Coordinating Council of Workforce Development and Education Unified State Plan. Another example includes expansion of hosted meet and greets by the Orangeburg County Economic Development Corporation for school district CTE faculty and manufacturing partners.

4. What significant barriers and/or gaps have been identified?

While the region demonstrates numerous strengths, including strong student outcomes, high credential attainment, and close alignment between education and workforce needs, challenges remain. Persistent workforce shortages and skill gaps, combined with low awareness and interest in high-demand careers, continue to narrow the region's workforce pipeline. Achievement gaps among special populations, along with the broader impacts of poverty and limited support resources, further hinder educational and workforce outcomes. While the teacher shortage has improved over the last two years, the region still struggles with recruiting and retaining qualified educators. The need for expanded-skill programming, as well as student financial aid and support services is further intensified by the region's rural nature, which creates barriers for student and worker access, transportation, and participation in training opportunities.

5. What actions are planned to address these barriers and/ or gaps?

Because parent and student interest in fields like manufacturing, construction, and transportation remains low across the region, stronger, more targeted marketing and outreach activities will be employed. Program capacity in key programs in Manufacturing, as well as Nursing and Health Sciences will be expanded through investments in simulation labs, updated training software, and hybrid instructional delivery.

The region also plans to develop new programs to address specific occupational gaps, including plumbing and expanded accounting pathways. Strengthening employer partnerships and MOUs is another priority, leveraging existing agreements to secure clinical slots, apprenticeships, and hiring commitments across the region.

The region is also making a coordinated effort to strengthen pathways and better meet employer demand through leveraged grant funding. Aiken Technical College, Denmark Technical College, and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College plan to expand pathway development and short-term training through participation in two U.S. Department of Labor Strengthening Community Colleges Consortium grants. These projects will scale internships and apprenticeships so that more residents can translate training into employment and assist with paying for their education. These projects also invest in modern manufacturing equipment and state-of-the-art mobile labs that can be used for short-term training at area industries and career centers. Dual credit options like Project Lead the Way (pre-engineering) and Welding, along with short-term credentials, will continue to be promoted as accelerated entry points into high-demand local industries.