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COVID-19 has changed the way we teach and the way we learn.

In education, the mission remains very much the same, but the strategies, tactics, delivery modes, etc. are all adapting, learning, and absorbing change. Along the way, education and training is bringing innovation to legacy teaching formats at an incredible pace; it is also bringing attention to the necessity of hands-on education while introducing multiple and often creative ways to deliver education remotely. Once we are past the constraints of operating in a pandemic, we will end up with a much-improved educational product, garnering the best of both virtual and in-person learning worlds.

In Joanne Cheng's article on "what Workforce Education is Learning from the Pandemic" (<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-08-15-what-workforce-education-is-learning-from-the-pandemic>) she identifies a number of COVID-19 impacts on workforce training that were just below the surface, rising at the normal pace of change in education and training models, until the arrival of the pandemic, when everyone jumped to overdrive mode.

More intense focus on learning a set of competencies or skills before moving on to the next course or courses will lead to more students successfully completing courses and increase the flexibility students often need as "life gets in the way" of finishing a program of study. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) had started moving in this direction prior to the pandemic as it had begun redesigning courses so that they could be completed in eight weeks compared to the usual 15 or 16 weeks. Students would have the same number of hours of instruction as in a 15-week course, but would complete those hours in eight weeks. A student would take fewer courses at a time, therefore providing more time to focus on the one or two courses. Following the 8 weeks, students enrolled in the next 8 weeks and therefore a student could complete as many courses as they would have within a traditional semester. Shorter program slices enable students to meet program goals/certifications/degrees while also juggling jobs, family roles and other constraints. The program requirements stay focused on outcomes, while the timeline becomes more manageable.

Many of the programs of study at a technical college require hands-on learning. This requirement is often met through apprenticeships, internships, clinicals, service learning, and onsite-laboratory instruction. The on-set of the pandemic and the subsequent requirements to control the spread of COVID-19 forced educators to rethink how they would continue to provide the necessary instruction. Part of the answer was to move as much of the lecture portion of a program to a remote format such as synchronous delivery through a conferencing platform. A combination of remote synchronous delivery and in-person has proven to be very effective. An added benefit is that many of these blended courses could easily pivot to being entirely off-campus in the event the pandemic worsens.

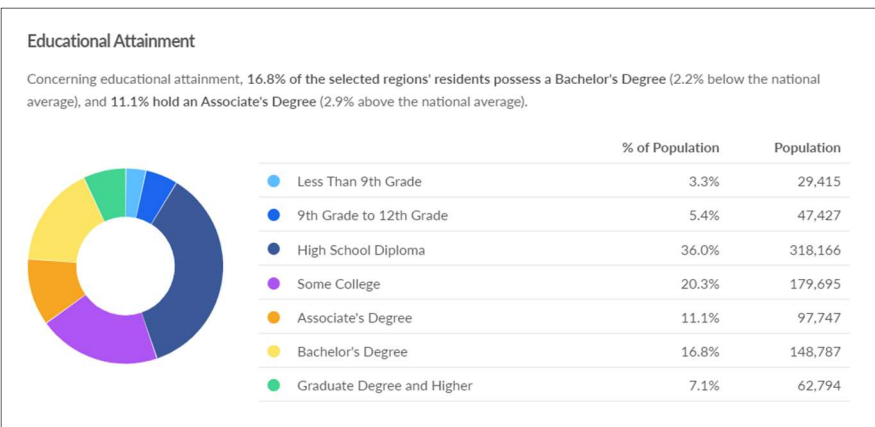
This strategy, of course, does not work for all of the hands-on or laboratory-based portion of a program. In the future, perhaps virtual and augmented reality tools may be of use. To date, however, the technology and its delivery is not readily available to the demographic or for the programs the college serves. With a little bit of creativity, however, NWTC's faculty stretched and continue to stretch the boundaries of how much hands-on learning can be delivered remotely. In the on-line magazine [The EvolLLution](#), the article "[Hands-on Learning during a Hands-off Pandemic](#)" authored by Dr. H. Jeffrey Rafn described a number of the creative ways in which faculty adapted hands-on learning activities for students even while not on campus.

In another example, UW Green Bay joined with Interapt and General Assembly to provide accelerated digital skills training matched to open employment opportunities in the region. College credits from the training can be applied to a degree goal going forward.

New North, Microsoft and Gener8tor partnered to run two accelerated training cohorts and part of the Microsoft upskilling global initiative that utilized LinkedIn Learning modules for digital skills building in sales and customer service occupations.

All of the post-secondary institutions in the New North region are providing similar creative avenues and opportunities to advance credentialing. People sidelined by the pandemic are tapping into the region's colleges and universities and into proprietary internet training (like Google and Microsoft) as a path to new, digital skills training. It is imperative that we anticipate and identify solid career pathways for occupations that are growing, even accelerating as a consequence of the pandemic. But a fast track is not the only objective, we also need to remain committed to delivering a complete education that meets the demands for the job markets and provides an avenue toward real personal economic progress.

Reaching a certification, Associate’s Degree, or Bachelor’s degree affords a genuine advantage in the labor market. In 2019 the median entry level annual wage for those completing an Associate Degree and NWTC was \$45,500. By comparison, a High School Diploma hit \$34,880 – \$10,620 less than an Associate’s Degree and a \$19,820 less than a person completing a Bachelor’s Degree. (NCES) For the state of WI., over 53.1% of the workforce aged population has achieved post-secondary education/training, a number that is trending up over the past



several years. The near-term goal is to hit 60% of the work age population as having completed post-secondary credentialing. The New North region has even better outcomes, at 55.3% post-secondary education accomplishments (New North IntelTracker).

COVID-19 has been an incredible challenge, but education and training is forever changed, and we believe that has been change for the better.

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To read more on this subject:

“[Hands-on Learning during a Hands-off Pandemic](#)” authored by Dr. H. Jeffrey Rafn described a number of the creative ways in which faculty adapted hands-on learning activities for students even while not on campus.

[Tumbling College Enrollments Highlights Pandemics Broad Impact](#)

Will the coronavirus pandemic lead to long-term changes in higher education? To better understand the challenges facing U.S. colleges and universities, WSJ’s Alexander Hotz spoke with administrators, students, and a higher-education futurist. Photo: Robert F. Bukaty/Associated Press

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*New North, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit, regional marketing and economic development corporation fostering collaboration among private and public sector leaders throughout the 18 counties of Northeast Wisconsin, known as the New North region. The New North brand unites the region both internally and externally around talent development, brand promotion and business development, signifying the collective economic power behind the 18 counties. The counties include Outagamie, Winnebago, Calumet, Waupaca, Brown, Shawano, Oconto, Marinette, Door, Kewaunee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Florence, Menominee and Waushara. The **New North Mission** is to be the catalyst for regional prosperity for all through collaborative action. To find out more information about New North, Inc., please visit our website at www.thenewnorth.com.*

This article and the [New North IntelTracker](#) offer data insights and trends to consider in your future strategy development, curated by the New North [Business Intelligence](#) Committee.

