



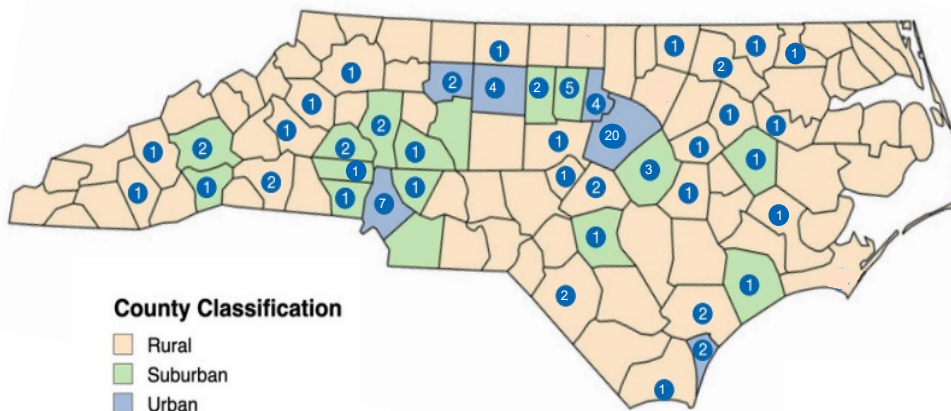
2026 Impact Report

Developing the Next Generation of North Carolina's Workforce Leaders

In North Carolina, the future of innovation isn't just taking shape in research labs or corporate boardrooms—it is being built in classrooms, community centers, and competition arenas across our state. At *FIRST* North Carolina, we use the excitement of hands-on robotics to do far more than teach code and mechanics; we cultivate the confidence, resilience, and collaborative spirit young people need to navigate a rapidly changing world.

This Impact Report highlights the transformational reach of the *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) program in North Carolina over the past year — showcasing how, through the power of mentor-guided STEM education, our students are growing into the compassionate leaders, creative problem-solvers, and workforce innovators of tomorrow.

Our Impact Across North Carolina



90 Teams

42 Counties

1,982 Students

93%

Plan to pursue a
4-year degree

98%

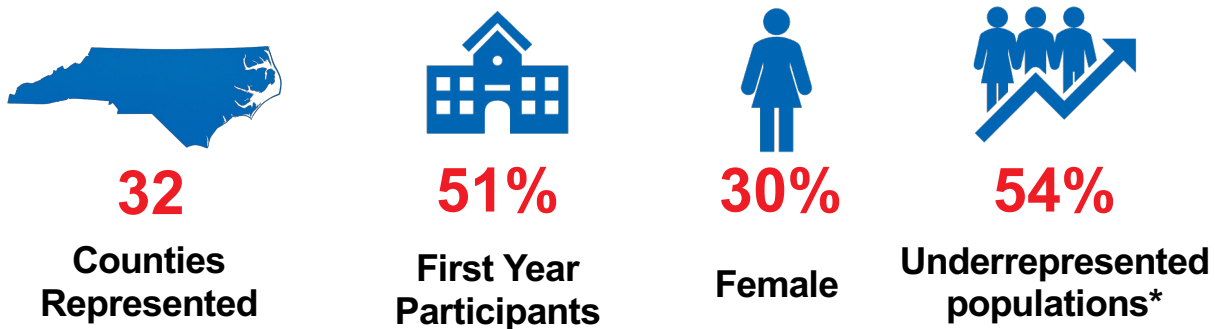
Plan to take advanced
high school STEM
electives

96%

Plan to do an
internship or
apprenticeship

Survey Results

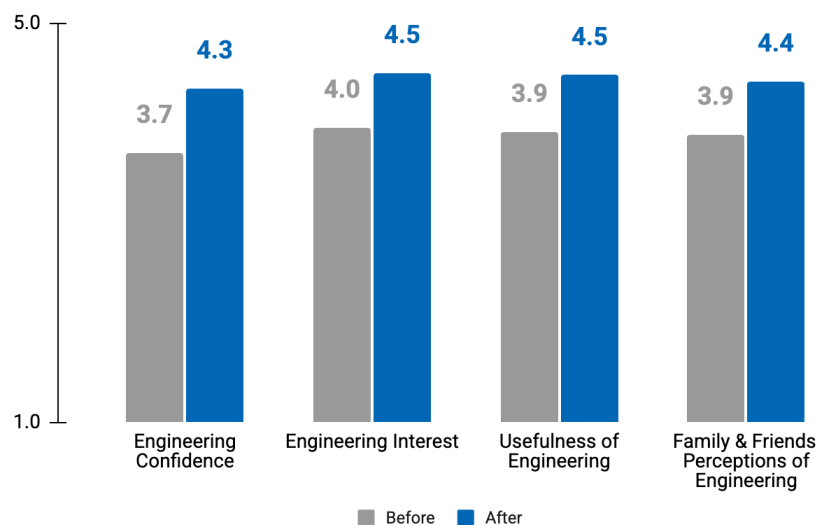
In 2026, *FIRST* North Carolina helped nearly 2,000 high school students build the technical, collaborative, and problem-solving skills needed to succeed in tomorrow's workforce. Survey responses were collected from **740 students —37.3% of all participants representing 32 counties**. Results indicate marked increases in engineering and coding confidence, driving high interest in advanced STEM coursework, internships, apprenticeships, and degree programs.



*includes students who identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, Black or African-American, Hispanic/Latine, Indigenous, Multiracial/Biracial, or another racial identity not listed.

Building an Engineering Identity

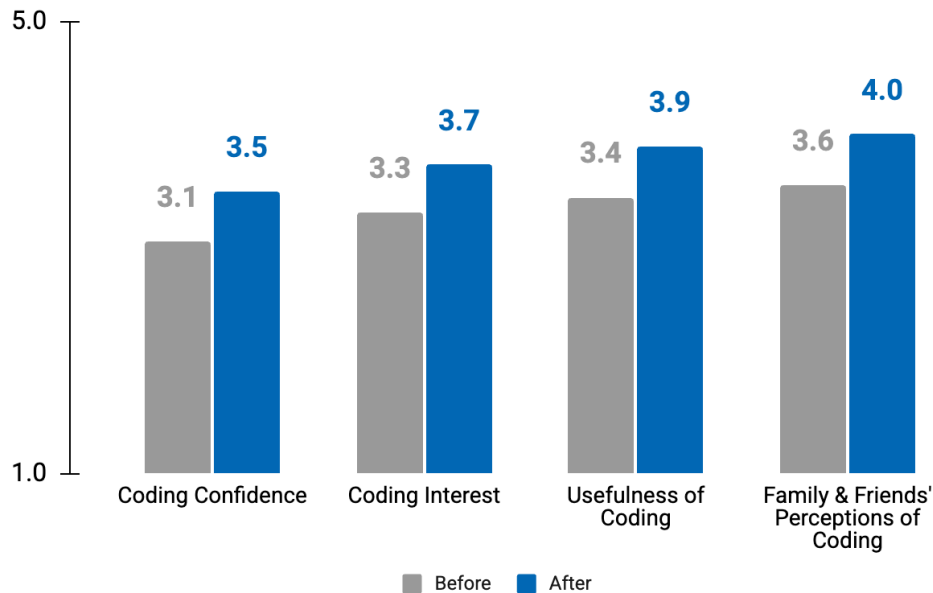
By the end of the program, surveyed participants no longer just studied STEM—they saw themselves as engineers, designers, and problem-solvers, establishing a core identity that will guide their educational trajectories for years to come.



Scales ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). All changes were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and reflected moderate-to-large effects (Cohen's $d = 0.68$ – 0.99). Scores did not differ significantly by race or county-level economic disadvantage.

Career-Ready Coding Confidence

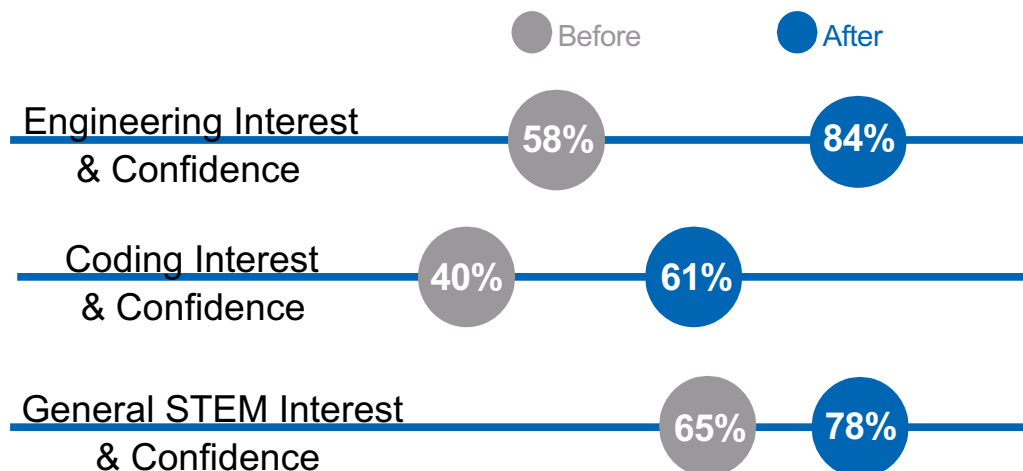
Students demonstrated significant growth in coding confidence and problem-solving—skills valued by the current workforce as practical, essential tools that prepare students for higher education and unknown, rapidly evolving future careers.



Scales ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). All changes were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and reflected moderate effects (Cohen's $d = 0.40$ – 0.62). Scores did not differ significantly by race or county-level economic disadvantage.

Expanding Opportunity for Rural Students

FIRST North Carolina is helping close opportunity gaps for rural students—from engineering confidence to social-emotional development—demonstrating that FRC can build workforce-ready skills even in communities with fewer STEM resources and opportunities.



Growth Beyond Technical Skills



The program fostered significant increases in student confidence, teamwork, peer support, and resilience, equipping participants to communicate clearly, navigate setbacks, and thrive in group environments.

80%
Reported
Growth

Inspiring Future STEM Careers

Students who participate in FRC are more interested in advanced STEM courses and STEM careers, helping prepare them for future education, training, and career opportunities.

FRC students said they plan to ...



Take STEM elective classes **(98%)**



Pursue a 4-year college degree **(93%)**



Complete an internship or apprenticeship **(96%)**



Take challenging science courses **(95%)**

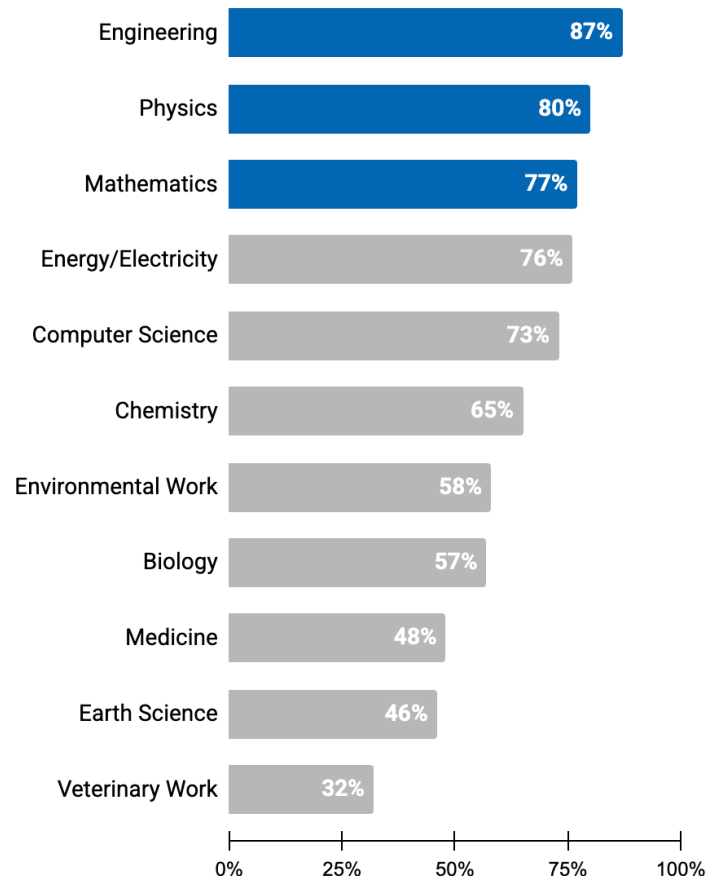


Take challenging math courses **(93%)**



Take computer science courses **(85%)**

The most popular career fields were **engineering**, **physics**, and **math**.



What our Students have to share about FRC...



Community Centered

“The best thing I like about FRC is that it is one large community. Everyone is so supportive of each other even though it is a competition.”



Collaboration & Teamwork

“FRC introduces not only industry level technical skills, but also industry level collaboration and problem solving that forces students to adapt.”

“I loved that the more I worked with people the better we both performed.”



Hands-on Engineering

“The aspect of FRC that I enjoy most is the learning opportunities gained from hands on competitions that allow me to truly understand the STEM I learn in school.”

“It gave [me] an opportunity to do things I could have never done on my own with my current resources.”



Empowering

“Being part of my team... helped me become more confident in myself and showed me how much can be accomplished when everyone works together toward a common goal.”

“I like how I can try a multitude of skills and learn many things — and fail a lot too and learn from those failures.”



Exciting and Fun

“FRC pushed me to grow fast, trust my teammates, and realize how exciting engineering can be when everyone’s working toward the same goal.”

“I loved the mix of chaos and creativity!”

Opportunities for Growth

Supporting Time Balance



The significant time demands of FRC can make it challenging for students to balance robotics with school, activities, sleep, and personal responsibilities.

ACTION: *FIRST North Carolina will continue developing resources that help teams establish sustainable meeting schedules, distribute responsibilities, plan ahead, and support students in balancing FRC with school and personal life.*

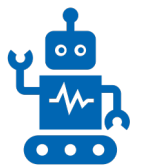
Reducing Stress and Burnout



Students shared the fast pace, long hours, tight deadlines, and performance pressure of build season and competitions can contribute to exhaustion and frustration.

ACTION: *FIRST North Carolina will provide strategies for managing deadlines, preparing for competitions, building resilience, and recognizing burnout while promoting a culture of rest, support, and sustainable participation.*

Expanding Access to Funding and Resources



Students noted disparities in teams' funding, equipment, facilities, parts, and mentor support that can affect both the student experience and competitive ability.

ACTION: *FIRST North Carolina will continue expanding funding opportunities, corporate partnerships, shared resources, technical assistance, and connections between established and developing teams.*

CALL TO ACTION

Whether you are a funder, educator, university partner, corporate partner, or policymaker – investing in *FIRST North Carolina* is investing in North Carolina's next generation of **innovators, problem-solvers and STEM leaders**. *FIRST North Carolina* creates opportunities for every student in the state to gain **real-world STEM skills**.

North Carolina – like much of the world – faces an urgent demand for skilled STEM talent.

By fostering **technical skills, critical thinking, leadership, and industry-ready confidence**, *FIRST North Carolina* is not only preparing students for the future – **it's shaping the future itself**.

Contact us to get Involved

info@firstnorthcarolina.org

www.firstnorthcarolina.org

866-347-7801