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YOUTHVOICE

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President Austin's Pathways Initiative Task Force Kicks Off with Data Dive

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This fall, NCACC President Kevin Austin appointed a task force to assist with his presidential initiative titled, Pathways Initiative, NC Counties Guiding Our Next Generation to Brighter Futures. The mission of the Pathways Initiative Task Force is to develop strategies for counties to reduce the rate of disconnected youth. The task force is Co-Chaired by Karen Howard, Chatham County Commissioner and Mike LaBrose, Vice Chair of Caldwell County Board of Commissioners and comprised of 17 commissioners from across the state. It will meet several times throughout the year to explore ways counties can engage youth to help guide them on a path to career success. The work will culminate in a report and roadmap for counties across the state to identify possible solutions.

On November 1, the newly appointed Pathways Initiative Task Force convened in Forsyth County for their inaugural meeting, which included an agenda packed with presentations and discussion. President Austin also unveiled the new brand for the initiative, which was inspired by the unique role county commissioners can play to address the



issue. As leaders of their communities, commissioners are able to champion best practices and strategies to tackle complex issues.

During the meeting, the task force focused on data and research, to provide commissioners a baseline of knowledge to understand the disconnected youth population and the various factors that lead to youth disconnection. Paige Worsham, NCACC Associate General Counsel explained how researchers typically define this specific population and the latest statistics, which show that 1 in 10 youth in North Carolina between ages 16 and 19 are considered “disconnected,” meaning they are neither in school nor working.

Rebecca Tippett from the Carolina Population Center at UNC-Chapel Hill presented her research which examines the education pipeline and follows how high school students transition into post-secondary tracks. Both presentations sparked engaging discussion that highlighted the complexities of this issue. The task force agreed to take a broad view of the issue to account for the many factors youth face, such as adverse child



experiences, that can affect their futures. The task force expressed other major points of concern including the level of preparedness among high school graduates for college and careers, and when and how to intervene in a youth's educational path to maximize their chance for success.

Experts from the K-12 education system, the higher education system and the business community participated in the meeting to explain how the population of disengaged youth in North Carolina affects their sector. They also shared their insights on possible approaches for the task force to consider. Dr. Anthony Jackson, Superintendent of Vance County Schools, shared his approach to education, which he developed over 25 years working in partnerships across all sectors to help ensure students have a path toward meaningful careers. He spoke about a unique approach the school system took to raise graduation rates in Vance County from 64% to 86%. And David Mounts, CEO of Inmar, challenged the task force to think differently about how to consider the issue and shared his approach to finding high quality talent for his company. He spoke about the speed at which the business community is moving and

the importance of having a talented workforce to attract business investment in communities. The task force was also joined by Jeni Corn from myFutureNC, a key partner of NCACC and the Pathways Initiative. President Austin hopes that the work of this task force will help contribute to the attainment goal set out by myFutureNC of 2 million North Carolinians with a high-quality post-secondary degree or credential by 2030.

It's clear that disconnected youth affect all counties across the state and that there is a need to be creative in how the issue is addressed. All members of the task force shared their personal interest and dedication to working on this initiative in the coming months. The vision for the task force is that they can share best practices, strategies and tactics that counties can deploy to make an impact in providing more pathways for their youth. The initiative also seeks to build support from state leaders for local youth engagement efforts. The next Pathways Task Force meeting will be held January 24, 2020 in Forsyth County.

For more information about the Pathways Initiative Task Force, go to www.ncacc.org/nccountypathways. ■



↑ The Pathways Initiative Task Force convened in Forsyth County for its inaugural meeting on November 1, 2019.