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**Regional Leaders Discuss a New STEM Education Alliance for Eastern NC**

**Greenville, North Carolina – January 13, 2023 –** Today, twenty-nine (29) school systems and fourteen (14) community colleges joined NC East Alliance’s STEM East leadership team at the East Carolina Heart Institute for the first planning meeting for a new alliance that will operate at the intersection of education, professional learning, workforce development, and economic development. The morning session, moderated by Dr. Tom Williams (President/CEO of Strategic Education Alliances) was focused on creating an “Industry in School” Alliance that brings together school districts, community colleges, and industry in a collaboration designed to bolster the region’s workforce. A steering committee comprised of superintendents, community college presidents, and NC East Alliance’s STEM East leadership participated in the morning session. At the conclusion of the morning session, there was a sense of excitement among the attendees about this new initiative.

At midday, a VISION 2023 luncheon was held to celebrate the launch of this new collaboration. Mark Hamblin, Chairman of the NC East Alliance, opened the luncheon by introducing the NC East Board and NC East Alliance’s STEM East Leadership team.

Dr. Michael Waldrum, ECU Health’s CEO, Dean of the Brody School of Medicine, and NC East Board member, then welcomed the group of 125 people to the East Carolina Heart Institute. Dr. Waldrum said, “I am a strong advocate for bold regional solutions for large regional issues and am excited to participate in VISION 2023”. Vann Rogerson, CEO of the NC East Alliance, thanked the many educational, economic development, industry, and legislative allies in the room. He also thanked the Vision 2023 sponsors: ECU Health, Kilpatrick Townsend/KTS Strategies, NC Biotechnology Center, and Nutrien.

NC East Alliance’s STEM East Network steering committee members will be inventing regional solutions to help educators become transformative stakeholders in the regional economy. A new Industry in School Alliance will focus on our +13,000 teachers and community college faculty as a regional workforce. The steering committee will collaboratively invent and implement a new educator training system to create a better understanding of nearby jobs and industry clusters. Our Industry in Schools program targets the “influencers” – our K-16 educators. As a result, our students will have an increased awareness of the jobs in the region, how much post-secondary education is required for those jobs, and what the salary range for those jobs is. The desired outcome is that more of the region’s high school graduates choose to remain in the region for work and/or education. The ultimate goal is to reverse the decline of our locally homegrown workforce.

Vision 2023 featured two panel discussions. The first, moderated by Dr. Tom Williams, included Cecilia Holden, President/CEO of myFutureNC; Catherine Truitt, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Jordan Whichard, Chief Deputy Secretary of Commerce. During the education panel discussion, President Holden discussed the importance of collaboration between superintendents, community college presidents, other local leaders, and STEM East to ensure the State meets myFutureNC’s 2 million by 2030 educational attainment goal. Superintendent Truitt, who deemed 2022 the Year of the Workforce, emphasized working together to envision a better connection between K-12 education and careers.

Chief Deputy Secretary Whichard updated the attendees on North Carolina’s positive business climate and growth with North Carolina recently being named “State of the Year” for economic recruitment for Business Facilities Magazine. He went on to mention how North Carolina’s strong workforce is one of the main drivers for the state’s continued economic prosperity.

The second panel discussion, moderated by Vann Rogerson, included Senators Jim Perry and Bobby Hanig plus Representative John Bell. During that panel discussion, the legislators stressed that student education and workforce preparedness are top agenda items for this upcoming legislative session. All are eager to help the new STEM East Network Alliance grow and positively support educators, students, and industry in the region.

NC East Alliance’s STEM East Network committee meetings will continue in winter/spring 2023. Collectively the new Alliance will plan a path forward. Dr. Ethan Lenker, superintendent of Pitt County Schools, concluded that “it is time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.”

*About NC East: The NC East Alliance is a regional economic development organization representing 29 counties in eastern North Carolina. NC East leads to advocacy efforts in the region by convening stakeholders to identify important regional challenges and to ultimately pursue solutions to these challenges. NC East has 30 years experience in economic development and has led regional STEM East efforts for the last 10 years. NC East staff recruits companies to eastern North Carolina and supports our existing industries.*