

# LEARNING CURVE

Businesses and educators forge partnerships to build a future workforce.

**Corporations such as Lenovo are growing their paid internship programs for high schoolers.** That's just one example of businesses and educators partnering to build the workforce of the future. Companies are helping schools create financial-literacy programs and develop global-learning opportunities and offering teachers hands-on experience in the private sector. Our round-table participants are pioneering partnerships between business and education.



Seated from left to right: **Will Chavis**, principal, *William G. Enloe Magnet High School*; **Udai Virk**, student, *Enloe Magnet High School*; **Lauryn Fisher**, student, *Enloe Magnet High School*; **Kartik Tyagi**, student, HOSA-Future Health Professionals International Secondary Board representative, *Enloe Magnet High School*; **Milanka Muecke**, director, public relations, events and community relations, *Lenovo*.

Support was provided by Caterpillar Inc., Coastal Credit Union, Lenovo, NCEast Alliance and Participate. William G. Enloe Magnet High School hosted the event. The transcript was edited for brevity and clarity.



Standing from left to right: **Annah Riedel**, Kenan Fellow and teacher, *The Exploris School*; **Lewis Ebert**, president & CEO, *North Carolina Chamber*; **John Chaffee**, president & CEO, *NCEast Alliance*; **David Young**, CEO, *Participate*; **Caroline Sullivan**, executive director, *N.C. Business Committee for Education*; **Creighton P. Blackwell**, vice president, corporate affairs and community engagement, *Coastal Federal Credit Union*.

## BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ROUND TABLE

**HOW DO STUDENTS WORK WITH BUSINESSES TO GAIN IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE?**

**TYAGI** At HOSA-Future Health Professionals, we have 235,000 members internationally focused on building on their passion for the field of health care. Some opportunities that we are proud to offer include internships, scholarships and support programs for students that are interested in the field of medicine. We have international leadership conferences and state conferences emphasizing how we can come together to work toward our common goal.

**FISHER** Internships help high-school students because they get you out into the field. I went into Lenovo. Going in, I just thought [it was about] computers and coding. But I found out there was a business side, and I actually grew an interest in the business side. I shadowed customer briefings and regular meetings, and I managed two events. I believe internships are actually really strong for high-school students. I feel like there should be more, whether for a small business or a big corporate business. I got an idea of what it's like to be in the corporate world, and it was a wonderful experience.

**VIRK** I participated in the Lenovo App Challenge and actually won with the app I created, Respirate. Respirate supplements pulmonary rehabilitation for people with chronic breathing problems like COPD and emphysema. We took the entire rehabilitation program, and we put it all onto the application form. There's no cure for these disorders; they are all chronic. But you can suppress them to a certain extent so that you can deal with them on a day-to-day basis. That's really what we wanted to do. As high schoolers, the things that I and many other students value the



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**LAURYN FISHER**

Enloe Magnet High School

most are opportunities, finding ways to make a reputation for yourself, finding ways to make yourself recognized and excel and show your ideas. That's what the Lenovo App Challenge meant to me.

**HOW DO BUSINESSES PARTNER WITH EDUCATORS?**

**BLACKWELL** There's not one industry that education does not have some

type of positive correlation with. We've had 25 Kenan Fellows that we've brought in for the summers to help us determine what financial education looks like for students. That was invaluable. We have paid for the Stock Market Game to be accessible to every school within Wake, Durham and Orange counties for free. I think these are continual stories as to how you will see education and business in a true partnership.

**CHAVIS** We're connected to many businesses in the area, and that has really propelled us forward with regard to preparing students for college or a career. Having business partners and internships and the experiences extend [beyond] the walls of our school. I'm proud that there's a community, there's engagement, there are partnerships, there are allies when it comes to really preparing our students for the next level.

**RIEDEL** I am a Kenan Fellow this school year, and I got to partner with Caterpillar over the summer to get exposure in the industry. The idea of the Kenan Fellows is that I get to go out and gain that industry experience, so that I have an actual real-world outlook to bring back to my classroom. Over the next year, I'll be developing a STEM

curriculum that will be shared across the wider community, not just with my students but with other teachers, to empower them to be able to bring some real-world learning experiences into our classrooms.

**CHAFFEE** We're not afraid to be a pilot in terms of trying something new, see how it works, test it out, and then team with a group like the North Carolina Chamber to see how we improve it and then extend it. We've been very pleased with that. I think in terms of how we engage employers in a relationship with public schools. Schools and their leadership are willing to take risks, they're willing to be innovative. It's a matter of identifying resources that can allow them to do that. We have a number of key employers, major employers. We are really interested in getting small businesses

more involved. It's simply a matter of reaching out and saying, "This is what we're doing. Would you be interested in participating?"

**YOUNG** We are a business that works in schools. We partner with schools and districts to offer global-education programs and help schools to implement things like dual-language immersion, culture exchanges, global-confidence programs. We believe that in an increasingly interconnected global society and economy, our students are going to need communication and collaboration skills and the ability to work in international teams. I think most of us can see, with the technology that's coming, that the reality is we have a set of global challenges that are going to have to be resolved. Much like a visiting professor would come into a university, we

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believe that bringing an international teacher into a school environment could have incredible impact. Teachers can all globalize their content, but they need training to do that. We've spent the last decade building what we call our Global School Model which now has been implemented across the state.

#### WHAT ARE SOME HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES IN BUSINESS FOR STUDENTS?

**MUECKE** We doubled the number of interns. They're well-paid internships for eight weeks. Those students this year at Lenovo did brilliant work. You underestimate the potential these students have. It just really has been a win-win. Just as much as we mentor, we learn from the students as well.

#### WHAT ARE BUSINESSES LOOKING FOR FROM EDUCATORS?

**YOUNG** When you think about recruiting from around the world, you're pulling all these people in; they want to know they have a place to put their kids where they're going to be welcomed, where they're going to have opportunities for a global education.

**EBERT** The No. 1 problem in North Carolina is, for the first time in our history, we have more open jobs than there are people to fill them. What a wonderful problem to have, first of all, but, second, a real opportunity to take this amazing education system at all levels and start to match it up to two paths that students need to think about. There's a college path

that's phenomenal. Our opportunities here are amazing, probably moreso than most states. But our community colleges are equally opportunistic and amazing. And there are some wonderful jobs waiting for students who go to any community college. In many cases, you have companies spending \$150,000 per student to educate them, train them, give them a job and pay them while they're learning. I think what you have going on are companies making a deeper investment in developing talent because we live in a very competitive economy. Getting connected to business, having classroom work be more relevant, the kind of internships you're hearing people talk about at the high-school level, [the] kind of externships that companies are

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# ENGAGING MINDS TO BUILD A STRONGER WORKFORCE



Nearly a dozen years ago, a team of organizations in eastern North Carolina started a collaborative effort to address workforce issues identified by leading employers about their ability to find qualified workers. ASPIRE (Assessing Skills for Performance In a Recovering Economy) was patterned after a program developed in Wayne County called WayneWORKS. This effort, involving workforce development boards, community colleges, and others, was led by the regional economic development partnership (now known as NCEast Alliance) that appropriated \$1.25 million over 5 years to promote ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) testing and WorkKeys Profiles. The combination of efforts led to a dramatic increase in workers possessing NCRCs (from 1,000 per year to over 10,000 per year) and more than 150 employers developing WorkKeys Profiles that specified a preference for hiring individuals that possessed an NCRC. As a result, employers streamlined on-boarding of employees with improved screening of applicants, reduced time and cost of hiring, and, in many instances, dramatically reduced turnover due to better worker matches to job openings. As a result of that success, the region was selected, and largely funded by, the North Carolina Rural Center to launch the state's first Certified WorkReady Community demonstration project in November 2011; a program designed to increase local

employment opportunities by improving high school graduation rates, employer and community engagement in ACT's WorkKeys Job Profiling and boosting the number of people obtaining the NCRC. The earlier partnership expanded to include, economic development, chamber of commerce/business, and K-12 leaders as well as the Corporation for Enterprise Development. In 2015, the pilot project was taken statewide and is now run by the North Carolina Chamber.

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*“We want a workforce of inquisitive minds that can take us to the next level.”*

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Well over 50 counties are now participating in the program, and the east still has more certified counties and certified workers than any other region in North Carolina.

While considerable progress was made developing a qualified workforce, more needed to be done – educational outcomes needed to improve - and STEM East arose to advance STEM-based education, teacher professional development and career exploration. STEM East Connect has been adopted using Nepris technology that allows teachers to query employees that can electronically connect with students from their location to talk about their jobs and

the educational pathway to a given career. “We want a workforce of inquisitive minds... that can take us to the next level,” said Government and Community Relations Manager Millie Chalk with Duke Energy. “And that to me is what STEM is providing us” she continued. The Duke Energy Foundation has been a major contributor supporting area public schools through STEM East.

Now in its sixth year of promoting STEM education, NCEast Alliance, is setting sights on expanding the nationally-recognized STEM East model across all 28 counties in its footprint. According to the NCSU Friday Institute, the impact of STEM East activities has had a positive impact on all students and a significant impact on the performance of minority students on end-of-grade science tests. Roughly \$14 million of external funding has resulted in the installation of 80+ STEM Learning Centers, a change in math/science instruction, greater funding for teacher professional development, a higher level of career exploration, and school district strategic plans to further develop ‘strategies that engage minds’ in eastern North Carolina. A model where everyone wins... students, teachers, districts, employers. ■



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## BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ROUND TABLE

making available to teachers, that's all part of the puzzle.

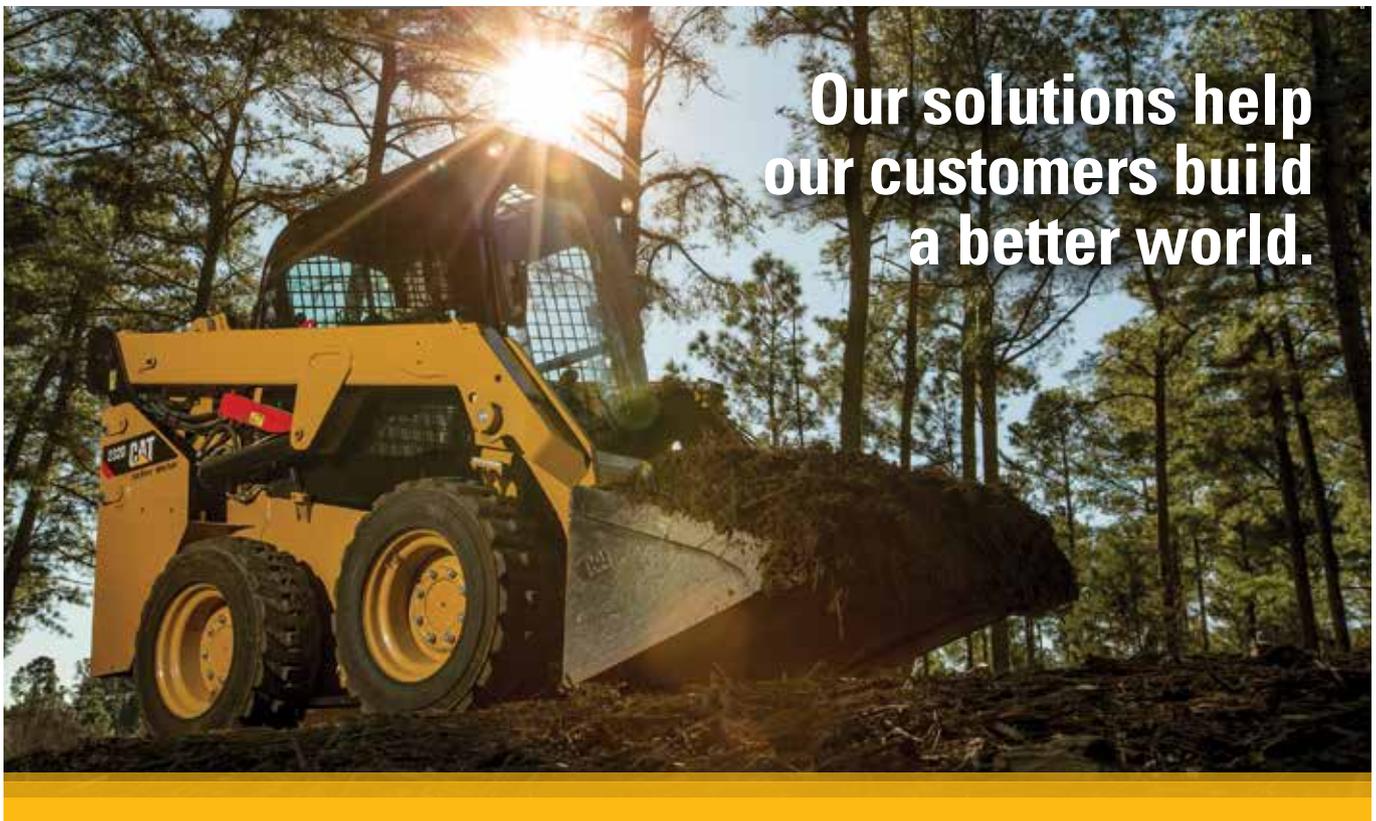
**SULLIVAN** One of the hard things that we're working toward at NCBCE is to get more students interested in apprenticeships and more businesses interested in doing things like that. But how do you know to do it if you don't know it's out there? If you don't understand what advanced manufacturing looks like, you're not going to be interested in these things. Any business, any employer, can get involved in work-based learning. You do not have to have a Registered Apprenticeship program. Every single employer can do a job shadow. Every single employer can go talk at a career fair. Every single employer can help judge a competition. These are easy ways for employers to get involved in our school systems. One program

that we're launching is called LINC-IT, which is Linking Inclusion and IT. And we're looking at the IT field. We're looking at nontraditional talent pipelines. And our first is individuals on the autism spectrum in information technology. There's a lot of interest among businesses about getting a diverse workforce and a neurodiverse workforce. And this is an internship program where, because NCBCE has the relationships with employers, they can have a four- to five-month internship with somebody on the spectrum.

#### HOW CAN SCHOOLS PARTNER WITH BUSINESS?

**CHAVIS** I think it's an effort of the entire school community. I think it comes from our teachers knowing what students need. I think it comes

from the fact that often, teachers provide students with activities, authentic activities within the class go well beyond just the written curriculum. And how do we obtain business partners in order to make these things happen here? It's not one particular person. We've committed ourselves as a school. If anything, I would say to any principal that they have to be very supportive of this innovation and getting out of the traditional classroom structures and allowing teachers to explore through their students. Let students have a voice. It's through their voice, their interests and passions that we can best support them. Now, if we're not doing that in this day and age, I don't think we're preparing them for the interactions with our businesses, our colleges and universities.



**CHAFFEE** It really often boils down to: How well are we communicating? The other side of it is: How well are we listening to what people are saying instead of having it blow right past us? One of the things that's come about as a result of what we've been doing is teachers coming back and saying, "I didn't really think business really cared about what we did in the classroom or that they were really interested in terms of reaching out and helping us in the classroom and exposing our students or additional resources for us to really elevate our performance in the classroom." Teachers have this newfound thought that what they're doing really is important and it's relevant in terms of what's taking place outside of school. ■

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**WILL CHAVIS**  
Enloe Magnet High School



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