



# BUSINESSES GET

Businesses across the state are teaming up with local schools and teachers to give students a glimpse into potential careers and provide opportunities to neurodiverse populations.

Seated from left:

**Caroline Sullivan**, senior advisor, *N.C. Business Committee for Education*; **Rosalind “Ros” Guerrie**, educational leadership programs manager, *BB&T*; **Libby Richards**, community engagement manager, *Lenovo United States*; **Kimberly Perry-Sanderlin**, advanced academics specialist for grades six-eight, *Brogden Middle School (Durham Public Schools)*

Standing from left:

**Albert Eckel**, partner, *Eckel & Vaughan*; **Jacqueline Jordan**, principal, *Moore Square Magnet Middle School*; **Rosemary “Ro” Lissenden**, director of IT, *Credit Suisse*; **Bo Somers**, deputy general counsel, *Duke Energy*



# SCHOOLED

## WHAT'S GOING ON AT NORTH CAROLINA BUSINESS COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION?

**SULLIVAN** The committee for the last three years has been focusing on work-based learning. Our oldest program is Students@Work. It started in 2009. It is a middle school career awareness program where young people go to businesses across the state in March and learn what those businesses do. This year, we had 48,000 students participate in Students@Work. We also have Teachers@Work, which is our teacher externship program where teachers spend either three days or a week in a local business learning what they're teaching and the opportunities for their students outside of school. We also have Ready, Set, App!, which is our brand-new statewide app challenge sponsored by Lenovo. That is launching this school year.

And the last thing I'll talk about is LiNC-IT. That stands for "Linking Inclusion for Innovative Talent." It is an internship program for individuals on the autism spectrum, and we targeted information technology at first, but engineering and some other sectors wanted to join in. It gives individuals who have hard skills in computer science or engineering the ability to have an internship with support in a business where they can practice their social skills, get accustomed to working in a dynamic situation. It allows employers to work with a new source of talent.

Only 14% of individuals on the spectrum are employed, and half of these individuals have an average or above average IQ. It's a huge source of talent for businesses looking to tap into neurodiversity — folks that are thinking differently — and bring really strong skills to the workplace. It also is a great opportunity for individuals who are on the spectrum to get rewarding jobs.

The round table was hosted by Credit Suisse and sponsored by Credit Suisse and Lenovo. The transcript was edited for brevity and clarity.

## BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ROUND TABLE

**SPEAKING OF NEURODIVERSITY, RO, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PROGRAM YOU'RE WORKING ON?**

**LISSENDEN** We met Caroline in the middle of 2018, and together with my HR business partner, we thought this sounded interesting. We have a lot of different IT roles, and alongside our peer companies in the area we experience the talent shortage.

We hired one person through Caroline's LiNC-IT program, and it was a great experience. They are so productive and fit in really well, so we brought them on full time. We did a second hiring day earlier this year and took on six as apprentices, two of which have now been hired as full time staff. And then yesterday, we did another hiring day and interviewed another eight for another couple of roles. We're learning there are things to do to set up [the LiNC-IT program at our company] well and set apprentices up for success. We're very, very happy with the results.

**SULLIVAN** Great things can come from people who have a disability. The benefits that their different way of thinking can bring to your organization are enormous. *Harvard Business Review* did a robust study of SAP, Microsoft and HP on the West Coast and the productivity of their neurodiverse employees — not just in the productivity of the individual, but also how they help their teams be more productive. The reason why diversity and inclusion is so important is to give different perspectives, and people who are neurodiverse look at the world in a different way but in a good way. We're having a neurodiversity summit at N.C. State [University] on Oct. 26 at the McKimmon Center, and we're looking for businesses to come and meet with a lot of the neurodiverse students from all over the state.



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**ROSEMARY LISSENDEN**  
Credit Suisse

A lot of these students do very well in school and have things like computer science degrees but have difficulty interviewing or with those first steps in getting a job. These are kids with really valuable hard skills that aren't using them. At the same time, we've got 30,000 open IT jobs in the state of North Carolina.

**LIBBY, TELL US ABOUT READY, SET, APP!**

**RICHARDS** As Caroline teased, Ready, Set, App! was developed in partnership with the North Carolina Business

Committee for Education and Lenovo as a mobile app development competition for North Carolina students. It will be launched very soon. There's information already on the web about it, but we'll be encouraging students to work in teams to think about a problem that they're seeing in their community — either in their school, their classroom or outside their community — and think about how they might be able to address that problem with the assistance of a mobile app. It's a way to encourage students to get experience in coding and programming using the MIT App

Inventor program and also work together to do some critical thinking and problem-solving. Students do a *Shark Tank* approach [project], where they're presenting their big ideas to local professionals to talk about how they think some problems might be solved using technology and using app development.

**ECKEL** We are very fortunate because we have one of the best workforces in the United States, and we have probably one of the most desirable places to come. Programs like the Navigator, programs like LiNC-IT, programs like Ready, Set, App! really get all workforce ready. One of the concerns that we all have as business leaders is that we have a ready, able workforce that is ready to move with us very, very quickly, and sometimes government can't move as quickly as we can. What NCBCE has demonstrated is that the business community can really move quickly and together to make sure that we're developing programs and creating awareness with teachers, students, parents and business leaders that actually really help address the real needs we have as we continue to position North Carolina as a leader in the United States.

#### **ROS, TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE BB&T LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE.**

**GUERRIE** The institute is a unique subsidiary. Most banks, certainly most organizations, don't have a [group] that focuses just on leadership development, but it is what became of an organization called Farr Associates. We've been around for close to 60 years. It was rebranded as the BB&T Leadership Institute in about 2014, and it has always had a real focus on BB&T as a primary client for leadership

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What I've seen — and what I think is also happening across the state in other areas outside of Wake [County] — is that with the absence of resources, schools are really challenged to meet the demands that they have.

**JACQUELINE JORDAN**  
Moore Square Magnet Middle School

development, but we also sell our products and services to other corporate clients.

Our unique business model allows us to take what we earn there, plus a great investment from BB&T, and invest in our communities by offering no-cost leadership development to public school principals as well as some programs that we offer in colleges and universities. We kicked that off in 2014 in North Carolina. We've had almost 1,000 principals attend at this point, including 600 from North Carolina, and it is an equivalent experience to what we offer to our corporate leaders.

#### **BO, WHAT'S GOING ON AT DUKE ENERGY?**

**SOMERS** I think North Carolina's goal is to have a smarter, cleaner energy future, and in order for us to do that, we have to develop and equip a diverse workforce that can help us transform the grid and innovate to meet our customers' needs, and

there's a lot of things we're doing to try to accomplish that. Just last week, Duke Energy announced a \$2.5 million grant investment in workforce development programs across the state. They're varied and range from programs and organizations that support military members and their spouses who are transitioning back into the civilian workforce to working with 10 community colleges across the state to develop a curriculum and a plan to train and develop the next generation of line workers who are going to help us transform the energy grid.

Earlier, Caroline was talking about Students@Work, and I'm going to take just a minute and get on my soapbox about that because it's one of my favorite activities. If any of you haven't done it, I would encourage you to get involved. It doesn't take a lot of time or effort to get your organizations involved, and at Duke Energy, I have been involved since the beginning of that program. This year, our Durham operations center hosted students from Lowe's Grove and Neal middle

schools, which are some challenged and underserved communities. We brought them in for a day of job shadowing and career conversations. If you've never met an engineer, a lawyer or a business professional, and you don't see someone who looks like you who does that job in your community, you might not think that's something you can obtain.

Our job in building that diverse workforce is to bring those students in while they're in sixth, seventh and eighth grade and expose them to the type of careers that are available. In the energy industry, we have very dynamic jobs. They're very well paid, and they allow you to provide for a family and grow and innovate. What we try to do is inspire that next generation of workers, whether it's at Duke Energy, another energy company or one of the many partners we have, by bringing them in and exposing them to things like drones. That's just one example of things that Duke Energy and a lot of other companies in NCBCE are doing to bring students, teachers and administrators into the workplace to show them what skills we need to build that new workforce and challenging and rewarding careers that they can have in North Carolina.

**ECKEL** We've said this after the first year of Students@Work. It didn't take an appropriation, it didn't take another agency to be created, it didn't take a piece of legislation. What it took was the business community stepping up and understanding that they needed to create the next-level workforce and engage with the education community. We're actually creating awareness and hope for a lot of those students who are going to be our next-level workforce. We hosted a teacher last year. In helping a teacher understand how we collaborate with one another, there were a lot of lessons that she was



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**LIBBY RICHARDS**

Lenovo United States

picking up and able to apply within her school at Chapel Hill. The problem is, we need the opportunity to do more of it, and the way we do that is with more companies like Duke Energy, BB&T, Credit Suisse and Corning stepping up to participate in the program. There's a lot of teachers that would love to participate in these types of programs, because they do bring real-world experiences back to

their classroom, but sometimes the deficit is not enough companies stepping up.

**KIMBERLY, ARE YOU WORKING WITH ANY BUSINESSES ON ANY CERTAIN PROGRAMS?**

**SANDERLIN** My connections to the industry started with opportunities like being a Kenan Fellow. The bulk of it

takes place during the summertime, and that really got me thinking. A lot of times teachers miss out on opportunities because of the timing. A lot of teachers have to work during the summer, but would prefer to be working for their children versus having to work at Walmart or other places. A lot of teachers want to be in there, really focused on having that time be as valuable as possible, but have to make financial decisions.

I've worked with some companies and consulting firms on thinking about ways to make partnerships with companies that are during the summer months, when teachers struggle financially. If they have those opportunities to be with those companies during the summertime, they can use that as a paid fellowship where they can really learn the industry and learn the company and develop the plan. Teachers

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**BO SOMERS**  
Duke Energy



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## BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ROUND TABLE

have no problem in creating lesson plans if they have the time and they're able to really work with the industries, and summer would be valuable time to do so.

#### JACQUELINE, WHAT IS AN ADMINISTRATOR'S VIEWPOINT?

**JORDAN** In Wake County, we're very fortunate. At the middle school, we have a person who's employed part time who serves as a career development coordinator. I would strongly advocate for that as a fundamental component to make a robust program at a school. That person, first of all, starts with creating a business alliance. We're so fortunate to be downtown, surrounded by so many different types of businesses. It makes it very convenient to establish partnerships. We have opportunities at the school to have a round table discussion like this about what businesses need from the school, and what the schools see as a need from the business community. From there, all kinds of events come as a result, such as the career days. Those are massive in terms of their effectiveness at having students really go through the motions of thinking about what their future will be. For them, though, to go to the business and see that it is a part of their community, signing in at the front desk and going upstairs and experiencing a sort of mini-internship, that is so much more powerful than me, as their teacher, trying to lecture them into paying attention so that they can get a good job one day. When they are in those office buildings, they are watching people collaborate in teams. Then, when we go back into the classroom and we talk about teamwork and we share the rubric for what it looks like to be an effective collaborator, we can more easily talk about what our expectations are. I do hear our career development coordinator



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**KIMBERLY PERRY-SANDERLIN**

Brogden Middle School

lament that she does run into trouble finding opportunities for kids to job shadow, to do little mini-internships and even getting folks in that represent more vocational fields. That's a legitimate need as well because we do want to provide a balance of experiences to student groups so they can see that there really is something for everybody.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON HOW BEING IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY OR

#### A RURAL COMMUNITY AFFECTS PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION?

**JORDAN** I tend to think of Burlington as a more rural community. I do worry about Burlington and other communities where resources are not what they need to be. We were just talking about the competing demands for money in North Carolina. The word "diversity" continues to come up. What I've seen

— and what I think is also happening across the state in other areas outside of Wake [County] — is that with the absence of resources, schools are really challenged to meet the demands that they have. As a consequence, our schools are becoming less diverse. I guess I'm saying to the business community that if diversity is as important as we say it is when we're talking around the table, we really need to look at policy and what policy is doing to promote diversity or, the flip side of that, what policy does to create a situation that is measurably not diverse. I know that there are areas that have less going on than Burlington, but it is painful, as somebody who has spent their whole life committed to public education and to have been in the first integrated kindergarten, to see things resegregating. ■



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**ALBERT ECKEL**  
Eckel & Vaughan

# Proud to support.

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Credit Suisse is proud to support the North Carolina Business Committee for Education LiNC-IT Neurodiversity program, and is committed to helping the Triangle area become the go-to location for Neurodiverse talent.

For information about Credit Suisse in Raleigh visit [credit-suisse.com/raleigh](https://credit-suisse.com/raleigh)