Initiative benefits kids, community, industries

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ASHEBORO — School leaders unveiled an educational initiative to provide local students with the skills and training they need for advanced manufacturing job opportunities in Randolph County on Tuesday.

Pathways to Prosperity represents a landmark collaboration between Asheboro City Schools, the Randolph County School System and Randolph Community College.

“We’re working together with industry to create a seamless pathway for students to go into a great career in Randolph County,” explained Dr. Bob Shackleford, RCC president. “Don’t be surprised if there are other pathways.”

Right now the focus is on advanced manufacturing for which local business and industry employers are constantly seeking skilled workers. This initiative will provide the training which will enable students to obtain good paying jobs in their own community and help close the existing job skills gap.

Joining with Shackleford in announcing the Pathways to Prosperity venture were Dr. Terry Worrell, Asheboro City school superintendent, and Dr. Stephen Gainey, Randolph County school superintendent. More than 50 school and community leaders turned out for Tuesday’s press conference held in the Computer-Integrated Machining area of the Continuing Education and Industrial Center on RCC’s Asheboro Campus.

The three educational leaders have been meeting, along with their staff, since last fall to develop the initiative. Work on it originally began nearly two years ago.

“Today is about Randolph County, not our school systems,” Gainey said about the endeavor, calling it a “recipe for a great opportunity.” He noted that it benefits students, the community and the non-competitive partnership which has been formed. “We’re all doing it together and doing it right for Randolph County.”

Worrell said she was proud to have an opportunity to be part of the “exciting and innovative partnership.” She also said that it has provided a foundation for education in Asheboro and Randolph County to “work with business and industry to create opportunities and partnerships relevant in our community today. We must teach for the future, not the past. Pathways to Prosperity is the way.”

Several Randleman High School students were in attendance and introduced by Shackleford as individuals who will "benefit from this partnership. There are thousands of others like them."

Afterward, RHS students, who are in metals and electronics high school classes, talked about the benefits of the new program.

Senior Mark Styles said he plans to attend RCC after graduation to complete its welding technology program. He knows he has at least two jobs waiting for him; one uncle is a welder and another is a farmer needing welding expertise.

Sophomore Dakota Simmons is taking both metals and electronics at RHS and plans to take advantage of the high school offerings and then RCC to pursue a degree in the manufacturing field.

RCC currently provides two other pathways — College Transfer (University Bound) and Career Technical Education (Career Ready) — for high school juniors and seniors. Through these students are able to earn college credit while in high school.
The newest pathway would be introduced to middle school students so they would have an opportunity to start taking classes as ninth-graders and all four years of high school. After graduation, they will be able to complete two years of course work at RCC and obtain degrees in their chosen advanced manufacturing field.

“They’ll be able to find lucrative employment without a lifetime of debt,” said Nancy Cross, who’s Randolph schools’ Career and Technical Education administrator.

She said local students would be able to obtain degrees and a multitude of credentials “which industries value and make them employable” after two years of college. Cross added that twice as many county students indicate they prefer pursuing two years of college rather than four. Starting salaries in the new pathways’ fields range from $32,000 to $58,000.

Also talking about specifics of the Pathways for Prosperity were Anne Hockett, RCC vice president for instructional services, and Dr. Julie Pack, Asheboro schools’ director of secondary education.

At the high school level, career development coordinators will have information about the initiative; guidance counselors will be involved in the process at middle schools.

Details are still being worked out for implementation of the Central North Carolina Pathways to Prosperity developed by the three local education systems. For further information about the planning process and the more than 40 industry, community and school officials involved, go to http://www.randolph.edu/pathways-to-prosperity.html on RCC’s website. The report can also be viewed on Asheboro’s website at www.asheboro.k12.nc.us and Randolph’s at www.randolph.k12.nc.us.

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Advanced manufacturing

focus of new Pathways

Four Pathways to Prosperity in advanced manufacturing will be available, starting this fall for the 2015-16 school year for Asheboro City Schools and Randolph County School System high school students, in the following areas:

* Computer-Integrated Machining
* Electrical Systems Technology
* Mechatronics Engineering Technology
* Welding Technology

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