Agriculture: The next focus of Pathways to Prosperity

GROWING PARTNERSHIP — In August 2016, education leaders, from left, Dr. Terry Worrell, Dr. Robert Shackleford and Dr. Stephen Gainey unveiled a Pathways to Prosperity focus on healthcare. On Tuesday, they will discuss the latest featuring agriculture.

ASHEBORO — Asheboro City Schools, Randolph Community College and the Randolph County School System will unveil a third pathway in their partnership project, Pathways to Prosperity, at a joint press conference at 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 10, in RCC’s R. Alton Cox Learning Resources Center Auditorium on the Asheboro campus at 629 Industrial Park Ave., Asheboro.

The project is based on a report, “Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century,” released in 2011 by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

In the report, school systems are “called to align Career & Technical Education (CTE) courses with area and state labor market demands and create a system of career-focused pathways that span the last years of high school and at least one year of postsecondary education or training that leads to an industry-recognized certification or credential.”

The three school systems debuted the project in 2015 with four pathways for advanced manufacturing jobs.

The second initiative in 2016 focused on creating health care pathways. Agriculture pathways are the current focus.

Personnel from all three school systems, industry partners and intermediary agencies have been working on the Agricultural Pathways to Prosperity Plan for months.

According to the Pathways to Prosperity Leadership Team, a strong agricultural climate in Randolph County and a demand for skilled workers, partnered with the increased interest in agriculture-related middle and high school classes and clubs, helped them to select agriculture as their next pathway. It was determined that the partners need to carefully address the careers in agriculture in order to retain students and continue to provide a streamlined process to go from secondary to post-secondary to a career.

It was further determined that developing an agriculture pathway will strengthen the local economy; address the goals of the Randolph County Strategic Plan; and provide a seamless route for students interested in an agriculture career to obtain certifications and an associate degree to achieve career and life readiness.

According to the planners, currently all middle schools and high schools in Randolph County have agriculture classes. Teachers from both school systems report that a substantial number of students sign up for agriculture-related classes. FFA Chapters in schools are popular and help to create a stable foundation for students interested in various types of agriculture careers through leadership and career exposure opportunities.

Randolph County has a rich history in agriculture that will grow with county leaders placing an emphasis on the current and long-term sustainability needs through the findings reported in the Randolph County Strategic Plan.

At the April 10 press conference, Dr. Terry Worrell, superintendent of Asheboro City Schools; Dr. Robert Shackleford, president of Randolph Community College; and Dr. Stephen Gainey, superintendent of the Randolph County School System, will speak about the new pathway and what it means to Randolph County students.